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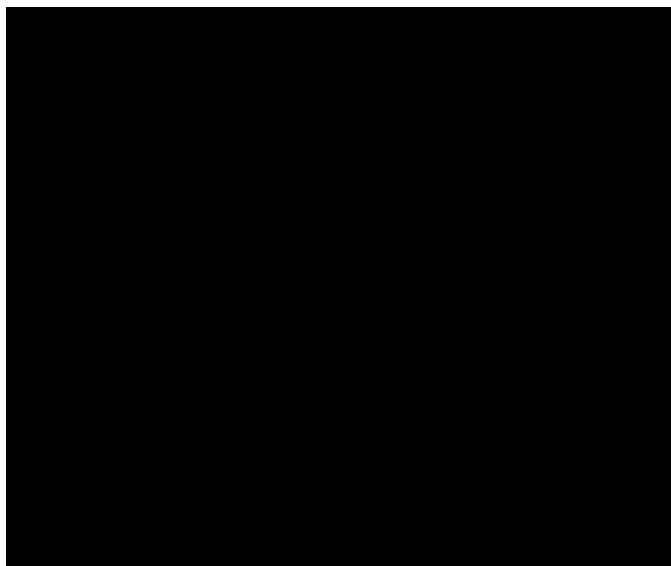
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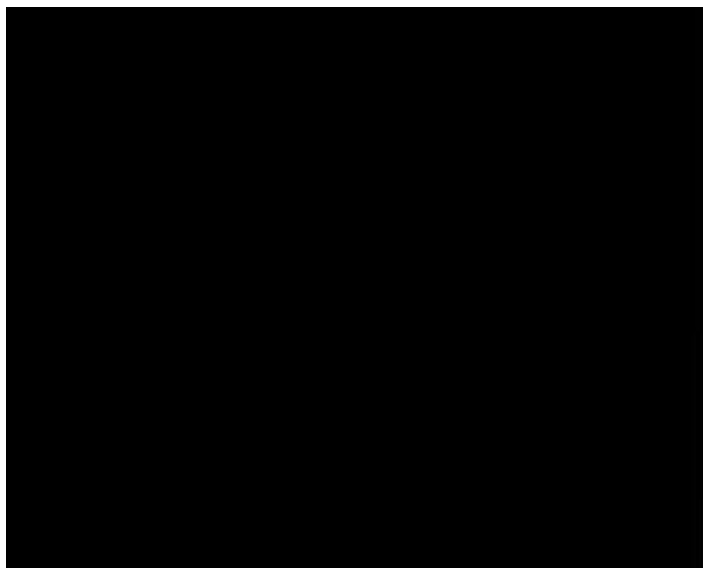
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MELANTHE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE MEDICI.

A Tale of the Fifteenth Century.

BY

MRS. MABERLY,

AUTHOR OF "EMILY;" "THE LOVE MATCH," &c.

VOL. I.

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33, OLD BOND STREET.


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CHAPTER I.

It was evening—and yet Elphenor had not quitted the spot, which, since sunrise, he had constantly occupied ; but, as the fading of the light disturbed the course of his studies, he threw his head back, and cast a look of impatience upon the glorious West, the crimson flush upon which announced that another day had passed. The deep blue wave of the Bosphorus was losing the golden tinge of the sunlight, and the shadows gathered fast on the majestic hills of the opposite shore, ere Elphenor could tear himself from the pursuit in which he delighted, and bring back his thoughts to the present hour. The ragged and discoloured leaves of a manuscript, in characters of ancient Greek, which was spread out upon the table before

him, showed the nature of his study; but the reverential care with which, ere he quitted the room, Elphenor collected and arranged these leaves, proved how deep was the interest with which their contents had inspired him. The apartment in which he sat, showed still more plainly the tastes of its owner, being the nearest approach to an extensive library that was to be found in the house of any private individual of the Greek Empire, as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The newly discovered art of printing had not yet found its way to Constantinople, and the bulk of some of the manuscripts often rendered it difficult to transport them from place to place. But to Elphenor the formation and increase of his library had been a work of delight, and in it he found the solace of many hours which otherwise might have been productive of heaviness and discontent, by leaving a powerful and ardent mind to prey upon itself. Elphenor was still in the prime of life. Formerly the bosom friend and preceptor of Constantine, his time and talents had been devoted to the service of the state; but differences having arisen between him and his royal pupil, Elphenor had for some time retired

from the court of Constantinople, and in the seclusion of his villa bestowed his whole attention upon the study of literature and philosophy. There, in his quiet room, did he delight to bury himself, and surrounded by his books,—treasures in the collection of which he had spared neither trouble nor expense, he would forget his wrongs, and, elevated and enchanted by the glories of thought and image revealed by the poetry of the ancients, so abstract himself from the material world, that it was frequently difficult to recal his wandering mind to the more sober realities of earth.

The labour or the pleasure of the day was now over ; and Elphenor rose, and, quitting the house, descended the terraced garden which led towards the sea. He moved slowly on, sometimes disappearing in the shade of the hedges of myrtle and oleander which bordered the path:—but having arrived at the end of the garden, he paused, and for a few moments gazed intently upon the road which led from the walls of the villa towards Constantinople. It appeared as though he endeavoured through the fading light to trace the many windings of the road ; but soon he turned,

and ascending some steps which led to a terrace overhanging the sea, he leaned against the marble balustrade; and the heaviness which had hitherto clouded his brow, gradually faded from it, as he contemplated the luxuriance of the scene before him, of which his own villa formed a conspicuous feature. Slowly his eye scanned each object in its turn, as his glance wandered over the beauties of that shore which is unequalled in loveliness by any other in the known world.

The banks of the Bosphorus, on the European side, presented a continued succession of convents, churches, and villas, interspersed with vine-clad terraces and gardens, so thickly planted with odoriferous shrubs, that the air was often heavy with their perfume. Midway upon the hill which crowned the promontory at the narrowest part of the straits, stood the dwelling of Elphenor. The Northern side was defended from the chill blasts of the Euxine sea by a magnificent wood of oak and cedar, which stretched to the summit of the hill; while upon the Southern side, all that good taste could devise, or art accomplish, had been lavishly bestowed, in order to enhance the natural beauty of the spot. The house was a long and somewhat

low building, relieved in the centre by a lofty portico. The spray of a fountain glittered between the columns of marble, and around, at intervals, were ranged the most beautiful statues and vases, not only upon the terrace and the steps, but interspersed among the profusion of dark-leaved and bright-flowering shrubs adorning the garden. Here and there, a large single oak or chestnut spread its branches afar, as though offering a cool retreat from the ardour of the sun; while thick clusters of magnolias and pomegranites mingled with the laurels which from the ends of the terrace dipped their branches in the water. The strait was so narrow that the opposite shore, covered with its bright kiosks, was distinctly visible; and upon a calm evening the voice of the Muezzin calling the faithful to prayer, from the minarets of the distant Turkish villages, might be heard by the holy Greeks, whose convents and churches, peeping out from the shade of their laurel and cypress groves, were thickly studded on the European shore.

As Elphenor gazed upon his home, it seemed as if he had never before sufficiently appreciated the

luxuriance of beauty by which it was surrounded. The day was fading, and the deepening shadow added to the rich variety of the scene. Not a sound broke the stillness of the evening, save the monotonously regular plashing of an unruffled sea upon the beach below, as the deep waters of the Bosphorus glided rapidly by ; or, now and then, the plaintive note of some sweet singing-bird calling to his mate from the orange and lemon groves, the heavy fragrance of whose flowers hung upon the lulled and breathless air. All was hushed,—and it might have been thought that in that spot, so full of peace and beauty, the spirit of man would have found rest. Yet Elphenor, as he dwelt upon the scene before him, appeared disturbed by some thought less tranquil than the hour ; for he sighed heavily, and, with a restless and dissatisfied expression of countenance, turned from the contemplation of his home, and fixed his eyes upon the waves beneath. For some time he remained standing in the same attitude, his arms folded, and his head bent slightly downwards, when a light step was heard advancing, and a form of such surpassing beauty glided to his side, that

it seemed as though one of the sculptured images of perfection, with which he had delighted to adorn his dwelling, had suddenly breathed into life, and, descending from its pedestal, had come to repay him for his admiration by the tender offices of love.

"Elphenor!" said a voice so soft and low, that but for the gentle pressure of a hand upon his arm, it might have failed to arouse the attention of him to whom it was addressed.

"Ida! my beloved!" he exclaimed; and, as he spoke, the cloud vanished from his brow, and he gazed with passionate fondness on the fair being who stood with his hand clasped in hers, and a face beaming with love, although a look of reproach struggled through the tenderness of her smile. She did not speak again; still it seemed as if Elphenor had read her thoughts, for he drew her to his bosom softly, as though she had been a young child, and covered her brow and lips with gentle kisses.

Well might the sternest have been moved by the beauty and tenderness of such a being as Ida. A Sciot by birth, she united the symmetry of the Greek

form with the more commanding air and height of the Circassians, from whose country her mother had derived her origin. From her, Ida had inherited the stately step and noble outline of the head and neck, which so much distinguished her from other women; while the long half-closed eye, with its black fringes and the slightly-curved upper lip, belonged more to the Grecian order of beauty. As she leaned upon the balustrade, the thin chemise of white gauze with its hanging sleeves, veiled, but did not conceal the beauty of her neck and arms: a small green jacket, embroidered with gold and pearls, confined at the waist by a jewelled clasp her flowing petticoat of white; while a few of the bright scarlet flowers of the pomegranate were the only ornaments mingled with the long raven tresses of her hair. Such was Ida—the beauteous wife, upon whose face Elphenor continued to gaze in silence, and with a look of sadness.

“Elphenor,” she said timidly, “another day has passed, and I have not seen you. I shall be jealous of your studies, if they occupy all your attention.”

“They do not steal one thought from you, dearest Ida,” replied Elphenor; “but I have been

of late more oppressed than usual ; I am not as I once was, and my heaviness may weary you ;—I am best alone.”

“ Oh, no !” exclaimed Ida, “ do not speak thus. Am I not your wife ? and ought I not to share your sorrows ? Nay, it is my right,” she continued, playfully taking the hand of her husband, and looking up into his face with childish glee, as if hoping by her gaiety to dispel the gloom which again began to settle upon his brow : but Elphenor only sighed.

“ I cannot bear to see you thus. Speak to me, my own Elphenor,” said Ida—her eyes filling with tears. “ None but the sinful should grieve thus while surrounded by blessings.”

“ You think me then without sin, Ida ; without cause for self-reproach ?—Alas, would it were so !”

“ How ?” exclaimed Ida, somewhat startled by these words ; “ surely, if ever being was faultless, it is my own Elphenor. You,” she continued hurriedly, as if fearful of contradiction, “ you, whom all men revere—and every one, even the holy hermit Gennadius, comes to consult as more holy than himself ; you cannot be sinful—it is impossible.”

“ And is it not a sin,” replied Elphenor gravely, “ to waste in useless inactivity the life that God has given?—to feel that not only the attainment of knowledge is within our reach, but that its application, by which millions of fellow creatures might benefit, is within our power; and yet to withhold all—to feel that day by day we but exist for ourselves, instead of living for others—for our country—for posterity?”

“ Alas !” said Ida, sadly, as she marked the glowing cheek and flushing eye of her husband, “ if this is the result of your incessant studies, have I not reason to fear them? Look round, Elphenor, and say, have we not all to make us happy, but the will to enjoy it? Does not this paradise belong to us? There, in that dear home, sleeps our treasure—our beauteous infant Melanthe - - - and,” continued Ida, while her voice faltered, and tears of tenderness fell from her eyes, as she twined her slender fingers among the dark curls upon her husband’s forehead, “ Have we not each other?”

“ Yes, my beloved Ida,” exclaimed Elphenor, clasping her to his heart; “ I am indeed rich in blessings, far beyond my desert—but still ——”

"Still you regret the court and your high station. This seclusion is irksome to you : I know it is," said Ida, somewhat pettishly.

"You speak as a woman, my sweet Ida—a fond and timid woman ;—*we* have higher duties to perform ; and to shrink from them to ensure a life of peace and ease is degrading, and wrong."

"Then why not seek a reconciliation with the Emperor," suggested Ida, "if you are desirous of re-entering the toils and cares of public life?"

"The counsels of Elphenor must be sought—not offered like the flippant service of a menial," answered Elphenor, proudly.

"Alas !" said Ida, sadly, "few know the real value of any thing till they have lost it. Doubtless, the Emperor has often regretted the obstinacy which drove you from him—though you cannot expect that I should do so, Elphenor, since it gave you to me. In the hurry of public affairs, you would never have found time to have sought for a wife ; but," continued Ida gaily, "I must make you confess that the days of our wedded life have not been the most unhappy of your existence."

"I were unworthy of so great a treasure as my

beauteons Ida, did I not own it," said Elphenor softly.

"Then I will not ask for another word," exclaimed Ida, rapturously. "And now farewell—it is late, and I must hasten to Melanthe—you will come in soon."

"Yes, soon," replied Elphenor; and Ida left him, and turned towards the house. Elphenor continued to watch until the last glimpse of her white dress disappeared beneath the portico; the gloom of his brow had softened to a gentle melancholy, and he stood with his eyes fixed upon the spot which contained his wife and child, until the stern reasoning of the philosopher gave way before the tenderness of the husband and the father. The words of the gentle Ida recurred to him, "Few know the real value of any thing until they have lost it;" and he shuddered as he thought of the troubles which, even at that moment, threatened the country of his love, and the dangers to which the dear inmates of his peaceful home might be exposed, should he be once again launched upon the stormy sea of public life.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER the form of Ida had disappeared from his view, so deep was the reverie into which Elphenor had fallen, that he was quite unconscious that for some minutes a sharp sound had broken upon the stillness of the night. At length, as it continued to approach, a jarring sensation upon his nerves, as though he had been suddenly aroused from sleep, made him start, and he turned his head in the direction from whence the sound proceeded. Nearer and nearer it came, until the regular step of horses ridden at a rapid pace became distinct, and in a few moments two horsemen were seen descending the hill by a road which wound outside the walls of the villa. At the first appearance of the riders, even the clearness of an Eastern night could not enable Elphenor to decide upon their probable rank or business; but, as they approached, his attention became suddenly fixed, and an expression of surprise and doubt, not unmingled with pleasure,

overspread his countenance. It soon became evident that his presence was also perceived by the horsemen, for they quickened their pace, and in another moment one of them dismounted, and throwing the rein of his horse to his companion, began rapidly to ascend the broad flight of marble steps which led to the terrace where Elphenor stood. The dark cloak and plain riding dress of the stranger did not conceal the grace of the form beneath ; and from the elasticity of the step, and carelessness of manner which marked his movements, it might have been supposed that the visitor of Elphenor had scarcely passed the age of boyhood. His countenance also, expressing as it did a light-hearted gaiety, confirmed the suspicion ; and although the long brown curls turned loosely back from a forehead white as snow, the gentle smile and languid expression of the large hazel eyes, gave to his appearance a slight degree of effeminacy, the defect was somewhat to be excused, for, in fact, the stranger had not passed his twentieth year. Yet with all this grace of childishness mingled a dignity which redeemed it from too much softness ; and, upon more close observation, might have

been detected even in that laughing manner an expression which spoke the habit of command. No sooner had the figure of the stranger become, beneath the bright gleam of the stars, fully visible to Elphenor, than the look of uncertainty which his features had hitherto worn, disappeared from them, and with a hurried step he advanced to meet his visitor, in whom, notwithstanding his disguise and the unusual mode of his appearance, he had recognised the Emperor Constantine. Arrived within a few paces, Elphenor would have bent his knee before his royal guest; but the latter hastened to prevent him, exclaiming, as he kindly extended his hand,—

“Reserve your homage for another time, dear Elphenor. It is as a friend, and not as the Emperor, that Constantine now seeks you.”

Elphenor only replied by a deep reverence, and by pressing to his lips with much respect the hand which his sovereign had extended to him.

“I see I am not yet forgiven,” said Constantine, after a moment’s pause, during which he appeared to view with pain the cold and grave demeanour of his former friend and preceptor. “Surely,” he

continued, "a penitent can do no more than confess his fault, and sue for pardon."

"It would ill become me," replied Elphenor, "to withhold aught that your Majesty might desire; but alas! when I was compelled to withdraw my services, it was only ——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Constantine, "all that you would say. It was my folly—my headstrong folly, that drove from me my only friend. Oh! you know not how bitterly I have repented it. Return to me, Elphenor; return, to bless me with your counsels and your kindness; your presence will awe the buzzing crowd of sycophants that surround me. Return, and in all I will be guided by your wisdom."

"My gracious sovereign, were I to listen," began Elphenor; but the impetuous Constantine again interrupted him:—

"You must listen; you must promise; only say you will return, and I will pledge my royal word, that the points on which we differed shall no more be urged."

"How shall I thank your Majesty for such gracious words?" replied Elphenor, much affected

by the evident sincerity of the young Emperor.
“ Still, I dare not say that I could weigh my conscience against the state expedients that ——”

“ Nay, you must have known,” broke in the Emperor, with a gesture of impatience, “ that when I yielded to the clamour of my people, and abandoned the design of uniting the two churches, it was a cause of grievous sorrow to me ; and not the less so,” he added affectionately, “ because it was the chief reason of *our* quarrel.”

“ Let not your Majesty, I implore,” exclaimed Elphenor, solemnly, “ urge a temporal reason for a grief which should have sprung from a sense of error towards heaven. Alas ! thus, when we waver in our duty, are we ever ready to seek a shelter from our conscience—conscience, the only monitor that never flatters.”

The Emperor smiled. But he knew too well the uncompromising rectitude of Elphenor, to be the least offended by the calm sternness of his manner.

“ Be that as it may,” he replied to the last remark of his preceptor ; “ but oh ! Elphenor, if you ever loved me, do not now reject my prayer !

Since you left me, you know not what I have suffered! Alas!" he continued, in a tone of deep feeling, "without one true friend and adviser, what must a monarch be? What but a puppet in the hands of his greedy courtiers! A tool to forward their designs of place and power, and popular so long only as he yields to their wishes."

"Is it not rather," replied Elphenor, "that decision is wanting, to assert the power that would make it otherwise?"

"I know not," cried Constantine bitterly; "but, dear Elphenor, you cannot guess the difficulties with which I am beset. Since you left the court, not one word of truth have I heard. I know not in whom to confide, and therefore I withhold my confidence from all, while each of my ministers openly boasts of alone possessing it. There is Luca Notaras, the grand admiral, daily he wearies me with advice, which I as constantly reject; and yet he announces to all that I see but with his eyes."

"The noblest steed may swerve from the sting of the meanest insect. God grant that your majesty may not already have been turned from the

right way by the underhand machinations of Notaras," exclaimed Elphenor, between whom and the grand admiral no goodwill had ever existed.

"How mean you?" asked the Emperor quickly.

"When his wisdom persuaded your majesty to refuse the hand of the Lady Bianca, daughter to the Doge of Venice, he shook with an insidious hand one of the firmest props of your empire. The Venetian republic will not soon or easily forgive the affront."

"By all the saints, it is too true!" exclaimed the Emperor. "Would to God, I had never listened to his boast, that the ships of the empire could sweep the seas of all the Venetian galleys in an hour. The time may come, when I would fain see a few of them at anchor in the Golden Horn."

"Evil was the counsel to reject an alliance so honourable," observed Elphenor.

"What could I do?" asked the Emperor, whose chief fault was indecision of character. "I was ready to marry any princess whose alliance might have been of service to the state—yet not one could be found to suit the rapacity of my courtiers. What can a monarch do more than yield to the advice of his *councillors*?"

“ Much,” replied Elphenor, calmly ; “ he can resist, when aware that it is injudicious.”

“ It is so difficult—so impossible,” said Constantine, irresolutely.

“ Not impossible. With the will to do, and the spirit to dare, there is nothing that is impossible,” answered Elphenor, firmly ; for to the young monarch who stood before him, his words had ever been those of a parent. “ Your majesty is right—it is well to listen, but not to all alike. Observe that stately vessel, as she glides upon the wave—how steady her course !—where would she be, did not one hand guide her on her trackless path ? Noble prince, your empire is but as that vessel—let one hand guide the helm, and let that one be your own.”

“ It shall be so,” exclaimed Constantine, fervently. “ I have yielded too long—I will decide for myself. By the counsels of others, have I dallied even with the safety of my throne. The foe is almost at our gates before we have even thought on the means of arresting his progress. You know not perhaps,” he continued in a lower tone, and bending towards the ear of Elphenor,

"that Mahomet is openly making preparations for war?"

"How?" said Elphenor, starting.

"Nay, more," continued the Emperor, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "he dares to boast among his infidel courtiers, that he will seat himself on our throne of Constantinople, and give our Christian women for slaves to his unbelieving followers."

"I do beseech you majesty," said Elphenor, hurriedly, "is this indeed a truth, or merely a report from the idle?"

"A truth—a certainty. This very day, a secret messenger from Calil Pacha, the grand vizier of Mahomet, arrived in the city; he but stipulates for a certain sum, and promises information of all that takes place at Adrianople."

"Villain, and traitor," exclaimed Elphenor, bitterly; "but his information is precious. Your majesty has not revealed this news."

"To none, save to you, Elphenor. To you, as to my only true friend, have I turned in this hour of need. Be once more my adviser. The people love you. Under your guidance, the interests of

the empire will flourish, and blessings join the names of Constantine and Elphenor. Say then, that to-morrow you will resume your place in the council chamber."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," said Elphenor, slowly, as he gazed upon the excited countenance of the sovereign whom he loved as a son.

"'Tis well," exclaimed Constantine, joyously. "And now adieu :—and he wrung the hand of his early friend with all the fervour of a youthful affection, and calling to his attendant, hastened down the steps which led to the road.

"Is this prudent?" observed Elphenor, as he saw that the person who held the horse of the Emperor, was a young Greek page. "At this hour, alone!—oh, suffer me to attend your majesty to the city."

"Nay, there is no danger.—Cylon is faithful; and Kaled," patting the neck of his horse as he spoke, "is sure—would that I could say as much for all who await me in yonder city."

"May God protect your majesty!" replied Elphenor, solemnly; for the tone of sorrow which had betrayed itself in the parting words of the

Emperor, struck a chill into the heart of his hearer: but the young and thoughtless Constantine was already in his saddle, and waving his hand, soon the clattering of his horse's hoofs upon the hard road as he galloped back towards the city, died away in the distance; and once more, Elphenor was alone.

CHAPTER III.

ONE hour had scarcely elapsed since Elphenor had quitted the home where, for some time, his life had been spent in peaceful seclusion. He had risen from his studies a moody, discontented man ; one hour had passed, and with it the sorrows which had so long weighed down his spirit, had vanished. His conscience was suddenly relieved—the wound in his affections had been healed—he was restored to the confidence of his sovereign and friend ; and, above all, he perceived that the moment was at hand, when the project he had so strenuously advocated as essential to the welfare of his country, must be carried into effect. Thus far all appeared bright. Once again he would mingle with the world—again would his voice be heard in the councils of his country ; and, by timely and unwearied exertions might that country be rescued from impending danger, and the empire restored to the glory of its former days. High thoughts

and bright visions filled the noble mind of Elphenor ; and it was not till he turned his eyes towards his own home, that a pang of regret forced its way into a heart bounding with joy. The soft glimmer of a lamp from one of the windows told him, that in that lonely room there were fond eyes watching for his coming ; and the spirit of Elphenor sunk, for he knew that the peace of that home was now broken—and for ever ! His retirement had become dear—more dear than he had been aware of—for ever, while yielding to the fascination of domestic ties in the society of his beautiful Ida, the conscience of Elphenor had reproached him for his abrupt withdrawal from the important situation he had held at the court of the Emperor Constantine Paleologus. In a moment of disgust, at the vacillation of the Emperor, upon a point which had long been a subject of controversy, not only in the Greek empire, but throughout most of the Italian states—the union of the Greek with the Latin church—Elphenor had resigned his charge, and retired to live at the beautiful villa bequeathed to him by his father, to whom it had been granted by the munificence of the late Emperor John Paleologus.

It was now early in the summer of 1452—a period never to be forgotten in the annals of the Greek empire. Some time had elapsed since the voice of Elphenor had been heard in the councils of his royal pupil; but from that moment the bosom of Elphenor had known no rest. At his latest hour, the dying Emperor, aware of the almost childish indecision of character which formed so glaring a defect in the disposition of his son, had implored Elphenor never to withdraw himself from Constantine, but to treat him as if he were his own son; and Elphenor had promised. How had he performed that promise? It is true, that so long as his advice had been followed, he had disregarded the annoyances to which, owing to the envy and jealousy of the courtiers of Constantine, he was incessantly exposed: but the moment he was convinced that he no longer retained sufficient power over the mind of the Emperor to dissuade him from listening to the injudicious suggestions of others, he had retired from court; and, bidding adieu to the toil and tumult of political life, had devoted his whole time to the fulfilment of domestic duties, and the study of philosophy.

His house soon became the rendezvous of all that Constantinople boasted as most distinguished in art or literature ; and these were not a few ; for the well-known encouragement which Constantine had always bestowed upon them, had been the means of attracting great numbers from all parts of the world. They had eagerly left their homes, and settled in a city, where the revival of letters and encouragement of the arts were avowedly the predominant tastes of the young Emperor ;—tastes which were speedily adopted by all who sought his favour.

The palaces and squares of the city were not only adorned with splendid works of art, but the private residences of all such as pretended to any rank or consequence among the nobles were highly ornamented, and filled with the most precious specimens of ancient and modern sculpture and painting ; while the formation of libraries, and the search after curious manuscripts, were among the first objects of the learned and the great. In these pursuits, the Greek priests were particularly distinguished. The establishment of schools of philosophy and elocution had been one of the chief

cares of the late Emperor ; and as the education of youth was at that time entirely confided to the Greek clergy, they had risen to be not only an opulent but a powerful body. To them it was not permitted, as to the Latins, to become soldiers in time of need, or to enliven the monotony of their lives by indulging in a variety of pursuits not forbidden to the Romans. The caloyers, or Greek priests, were remarkable for the austerity of their lives ; yet, from being constantly immured within their colleges and monasteries, and subjected to one unbroken routine of study and devotion, too often degenerated into indolent and intolerant bigots. It is true that amongst them were some whose ardent and inquiring minds could ill brook the confinement of the cloister ; and of these, many obtained permission from their patriarch to wander forth over the world, and spend their days in the search after, or diffusion of, knowledge. When a certain time had elapsed, they were bound to return to their home ; and it had long been a matter of emulation amongst them, as to who should enrich the library of their college with the most precious books and manuscripts. In this manner, an invaluable store

of information constantly accumulated ; and in the reign of Constantine it was his glorious boast, that within the walls of his city were collected more books and learned men than could be found in all the countries of the West. The Greeks were proverbially avaricious—the liberality of the Emperor well known, and the certainty of reward for the discovery of any valuable work in art or literature was, therefore, not a slight incentive towards industry of research. The popularity of a sovereign, who could as readily distinguish as recompense merit, was soon established ; and the young and handsome Constantine was hailed by all classes, as the benefactor and ornament of his country. Acclamations, mingled with blessings, greeted him on every side ; and as at first he prudently refrained from awakening the bigotry of his people, by attacking their prejudices, peace and happiness appeared to smile upon him, and promise him a long and a happy reign. A short time, however, had elapsed, ere a cloud gathered on the horizon of his hitherto bright existence ; and it was during the retirement of Elphenor, that a

change took place in the position of Constantinople, which threatened serious consequences.

Amurath, the Sultan of the Turks, and the bitter enemy of the Greeks, had died ; but, instead of the hoped-for cessation of anxiety and terror with which he had constantly overwhelmed the city of Constantinople, a foe still more fierce and implacable had arisen in the person of his son and successor, Mahomet II. From the moment of his accession to the throne, his words had been of peace, while the warlike preparations in which he was constantly engaged, left little doubt that the accomplishment of some long meditated project was not far distant. As his preparations advanced, so did the reserve which he had hitherto maintained disappear ; and the bitter taunts which he began unsparingly to lavish upon the Greek empire, showed that it was not less to him, than it had been to his predecessors, an object of jealousy and dislike. As yet, he had refrained from any movement of hostility, and the easy and trusting spirit of Constantine had remained in repose ; till at length aroused by some private

information, the Greek Emperor suddenly became alarmed, and starting from his fancied security looked around for the support which, in case of attack, the isolated position of his city must eventually render indispensable.

His first and most natural appeal for succour was to Rome. Rome, even then in her decline—alike destitute of treasure and of troops—Rome was still powerful. The halo of sanctity still surrounded the Holy See, and commanded the bigotry of many; and although the city of the Pope was herself too often forced to lean upon mercenary aid, yet whenever a foreign state entered upon any undertaking, the blessing of the Pontiff was still craved as in former days, and the countenance of his Legate relied upon, as giving weight to the power that was sanctified by his presence. Thus, decaying daily in physical resources, the church of Rome still continued to maintain a moral authority, which in many instances supplied the place of a more real power. At the period when the first alarm compelled Constantine to take some steps towards his own defence, Nicholas V. filled the papal chair. To him, as to a father, did the

Emperor reveal the situation of his affairs, imploring timely and sufficient aid to avert the coming storm. But his prayers were addressed to an unwilling ear. To Rome, the possession of Constantinople had long been a cause of distress and annoyance. Forgetting that the seat of her own empire had been transferred thither, Rome appeared to consider Constantinople as a mere colony. The indolence of the popes, and the avarice of the cardinals, blinded them to the necessity of cordially supporting their Greek brethren; and, wearied by the continual complaints and applications for money or support which they received from the Emperors of Constantinople, they had latterly manifested a cold indifference to the fate of a city in which their own was in reality so much involved.

The moral as well as the local situation of Constantinople presented features so peculiar, as to be in a great measure the cause of the embarrassment from which she so frequently suffered. The population was composed of two nations, differing in their habits, customs, and religion. The greater portion was Greek; but unhappily for the pro-

tection of the empire, the spirit of the Grecian warriors of old dwelt not in the breasts of their descendants. A people, composed chiefly of priests, merchants, and artisans, much as it may desire peace for the protection of its various interests, is the least calculated to secure it by affording the means of a vigorous defence in the hour of need. The Greeks counted few soldiers. Those who had been trained to arms, were only to be found among the Romans who made up the remainder of the population, together with some foreigners, chiefly Venetian and Genoese. The latter had established themselves in the suburb of Galata, forming a sort of colony dependent on the city. As their only avowed object was trade, their faith had been more than once doubtful; and Constantine felt that little reliance was to be placed upon men, whose very position without the walls might be an inducement to submission on the first approach of an enemy.

Under these circumstances, it should have been the policy of the Emperor of Constantinople ever to have maintained a perfect understanding with the Roman powers. Rome, the founder of the

city, should have been its protector; but, like an unnatural parent, in the hour of adversity, instead of compassionating the sorrows of her child, she hardened her heart against its cries, by dwelling on the faults that had led to its distress, and the annoyance they had caused to herself. How often do the vices or follies of one to whom the charge of a people has been committed, entail misery and ruin upon his successor! Constantine soon found that he had inherited, not only the empire, but the disadvantageous position in which the impolitic conduct of his predecessors had placed it; and the unsteadiness of purpose, which he had displayed upon the only occasion upon which he had been brought into connection with the Holy See, had revived and strengthened the prejudice with which Rome had been too long accustomed to regard Constantinople. Supported by the powerful and enlightened mind of Elphenor, Constantine had at once embraced the proposition of uniting the Greek and Latin churches; and his first trial of power had been an attempt to enforce the decree, which had been passed some years previously at the Council of Florence, authorising the union. Like his

father, the Emperor John Paleologus, Constantine had abandoned the attempt, terrified by the violence of the schism which arose, as it had done before, on the first mention of the contemplated union. By this one act of weakness, Constantine shook with his own hand the foundation of his empire.

All those, whose superior intelligence rendered them favourable to the proposed act of union (at the head of whom was Elphenor) withdrew from his councils; and the Emperor was left surrounded by a weak and interested faction, while he was overwhelmed by the reproaches which the Pope unhesitatingly lavished upon him. Under these circumstances, it is not to be supposed that the prayers of Constantine for succour were favourably received by the Holy See. In a paroxysm of rage, Nicholas V. refused even to admit the ambassadors of the Emperor.

“It was not,” he said, “worth while attempting to avert the ruin, which would infallibly overwhelm the city that openly gave a preference to temporal over spiritual blessings.”

How frequently does it appear that words spoken

in anger or in deep grief are prophetic ! Not many years elapsed, ere the proud Nicholas lay on his death-bed, mourning with bitter tears the sorrows he had foretold, and the harshness with which he had repulsed the prayer of the ill-fated Constantine ! At the time these words were spoken, danger was comparatively at a distance, and the pride of the angry Pontiff was gratified by the idea of the dependence to which he hoped to have reduced the city of Constantinople. The ambassadors of the Emperor quitted Rome, and returned to inform their anxious and perplexed sovereign of the ill success of their mission. Constantine was thunderstruck at the manner of their reception ; and although his conscience absolved him of intentional deception, he saw at once that his weakness upon the point which the Pope had so much at heart, was the cause of his contemptuous refusal of his demand. The high spirit of the young Emperor was roused by the affront, but his calmer judgment told him that resistance was useless. Submission and reconciliation with the Holy See must be his first object. His own empire was as it were in an enemy's country. In a moment he might be hemmed in on all sides ; and he

well knew his city did not possess within itself resources sufficient for its defence. Instant decision was therefore necessary, and the mind of the Emperor turned to him for whom his heart had so often yearned—the adviser of his youth—Elphenor.

So long as the quarrel between them could be deemed personal, so long had the pride of the monarch struggled with the affections of the friend ; and though hourly desiring a reconciliation, he had allowed more than two years to elapse without having seized upon any opportunity which might, without a compromise of dignity on his part, have afforded a pretext for an adjustment of differences.

Now, the aspect of affairs had changed, and at once, by a noble effort, he cast aside personal considerations ; and resolutely avoiding any consultation with those who might have endeavoured to dissuade him from such a step, he had secretly left his palace, accompanied only by Cylon, a young Greek slave whom he had rescued in battle and restored to freedom, and once more had taken the well-known road to the villa of Elphenor, his early friend, and the only one in whom he felt he could place unbounded confidence.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was much of joy mingled with regret, which filled the gentle bosom of Ida, on hearing of the sudden change in her existence, which would probably ensue from the interview between the Emperor and Elphenor. The love of Ida for her husband amounted almost to idolatry; and to a woman who really loves, it is ever a moment of rapture, when she perceives that the talents and noble qualities of the object of her tenderness are appreciated as they deserve. The education of Ida had not been superior to that of most ladies of her own rank; and in those days, though Italy as well as Greece could boast of some, whose extraordinary endowments and cultivation were esteemed an honour to their country; yet, in general, the education of women was then, very much as it is now, confined to the more superficial accomplishments that captivate, rather than to the more solid attainments of study calculated to strengthen and enlarge

the understanding. To sing ; to dance the Romaika with grace ; to excel in embroidery ; and acquire a sort of airy eloquence in the recital of fables and Eastern tales, when grouped together under the shadow of the trees, were the chief accomplishments of the young and beautiful Greek ladies, who might often have been seen assembled in the gardens of Ida.

Beyond these studies, few were inclined to venture, until the rage for the productions of Petrarch had reached their happy shores. Then, indeed, sprang up the desire of imitation ; and to emulate the Italian ladies in the recital of the verses of their gifted countryman, became the object of ambition to the lively Greeks, who vied with each other in the attainment of the language in which the sonnets were written. Some there were, who, having mastered the first difficulty, hesitated not to encounter others ; and latterly more than once the lays of Provence might have been heard floating gaily on the twilight air, the perfumed breath of which scarcely a moment before had wafted over the wave of the Bosphorus the tender accents of Italian love.

In all these light and feminine accomplishments, Ida shone pre-eminent ; but it was not the possession of them which had won for her the love of Elphenor. It was her gentleness, her sweetness of temper, and the noble rectitude of mind, which gave to her slightest thought something sublime and holy,—which had irresistibly attracted one, who, though unshackled by a vow, had ever contemplated marriage as a position totally incompatible with his grave and studious habits. Each day succeeding that upon which he had first called Ida by the name of wife, only tended to confirm his happiness; and the birth of a daughter seemed to leave to the delighted mother no wish ungratified. Yet, sometimes her smile would grow sad, and a look of anxiety overspread her features, as she gazed upon her husband's brow, and beheld the gloom which had latterly become more apparent there. Since his retirement from court, Elphenor had not once visited Constantinople. For several weeks, however, Ida knew that a more constant communication than formerly had been maintained between her husband and the friends he had left in the city ; and many deep conferences had taken place within the walls

of the villa with some, who, though personally strangers to Ida, she knew at once to be grave and holy men. The nature of these mysterious meetings had not been revealed by Elphenor ; and Ida forbore to question, when she perceived the painful impression they usually left upon the mind of her husband. The visit of the Emperor was immediately made known to her ; and deeply as she felt that its effects must trench upon her private peace, the noble heart of Ida bounded at the idea of the reconciliation, which would prove to the world that the transcendant worth and talent of him she adored were duly appreciated by his sovereign.

On the following morning, with a glowing cheek, though tearful eye, Ida accompanied Elphenor to the confines of their little domain ; and standing with Melanthe, her infant daughter, in her arms, she watched the receding form of her husband, as with his attendants he once more took the road to Constantinople, until, as he slowly disappeared from her view, tears of joy and pride fell fast from her eyes. Long did she linger upon the spot where she had received his farewell embrace ; it seemed as if a new life was about to open to her

view ; and she looked upon the beautiful scenery around, and upon every well-known object, with a jealous fondness, as if her heart foreboded a separation from all that had witnessed the perfection of happiness she had enjoyed upon that spot. In the mean time, Elphenor was advancing on his journey ; and before Ida could rouse herself from the meditation into which this unlooked-for event had plunged her, he had once again entered Constantinople.

CHAPTER V.

It wanted yet some time to the usual hour of the assembly of the Council of Constantine, when Elphenor, having arrived at the entrance of the Hippodrome, resigned his horse to the care of an attendant, and proceeded on foot to the imperial palace. One moment he paused, to gaze upon the beautiful city where he had dwelt so long, that each object upon which his eye rested seemed associated even with the years of his childhood. There, at the farther end of the arena, still stood the brazen column — the long-wished-for goal, towards which during many a race the eye of Elphenor had been strained. There, also, glittering in the bright sunlight, were the beautiful columns of green jasper, supposed to be unequalled in the world. They were ranged in a circle; and such was their towering height, that the colossal statues placed at intervals between them, appeared but the ordinary size of mortals; while, in the centre, stood the mysterious serpentine column,

round which in early days Elphenor had so often wandered, pondering upon the firmly-believed tradition of its being the identical column which had supported the tripod of Delphi, until, in the excitement of boyish superstition, he had sometimes feared to behold the three grisly heads of the monsters, whose twisted bodies formed the pillar, pour forth their separate streams of water, wine, and milk, as he had learned from the legends of old, had been the mode of their bearing testimony to the divinity of Apollo.

Elphenor smiled as the recollection of those light-hearted days shone across his mind; but the smile vanished, and a look of bitter sorrow replaced it, as his eye wandered over the splendours of his beloved city, and he felt that the foe was at its gates.

There could not have been a spot more favourably marked by nature for the site of a metropolis than that which was occupied by the city of Constantinople. A striking confirmation of this opinion existed in the fact of its having once before been chosen for the capital of a kingdom. Byzas, King of the Megareans, founded upon it a city, which from him took the name of Byzantium; and after

a great variety of vicissitudes, having fallen alternately into the hands of the Spartans, the Athenians, and the Romans, was annexed by Vespasian to a province. It was not, however, until the final struggle for the empire with Licinius, that the idea occurred to Constantine of founding a city upon the spot. Licinius had taken refuge in Byzantium; and during the siege, Constantine had full leisure to observe the advantages of the situation. Upon the fall of his rival, he determined at once to build a city of unequalled magnificence, and, by transporting his court thither, to make it the capital of the Roman Empire. Then rose up on all sides, as if by the wand of an enchanter, the splendid palaces and churches with which the Seven Hills still were crowned. To make his new seat of empire as nearly as possible resemble Rome, was the great object of its imperial founder, who even attempted to give it the name of "New Rome," but fate, or the gratitude of his people, decreed otherwise; and the name of Constantinople, which his subjects gave it in honour of their Emperor, took precedence of that which he had bestowed upon it, and has been preserved unchanged to the present day.

The stupendous work of creating a capital had

been the effort of a single mind ; but it had been left to after-ages to complete and adorn what had been so nobly conceived and begun. Proud of their empire, the Roman Greeks had never spared either trouble or expense in the embellishment of their capital, and on all sides the eye rested upon the most exquisite works of art. Every country seemed to have contributed its most precious things ; and, as Elphenor stood upon the eminence he had gained, and looked around, as if counting the treasures his beloved city possessed, there might have been seen not merely the gems of Greek and Italian industry, but among columns of porphyry and jasper, vases and statues of workmanship so exquisite, that each threw the last observed into shade. At a distance, arose the towering obelisk and pyramid ; while gigantic forms of granite and basalt, grimly reposing far from their native shores, led the mind back to the dark lore of the Egyptians, and showed, as it were, by their stupendous proportions, how strong must have been the desire of the Christian emperors to embellish and enrich their city.

It was but for a moment that Elphenor contemplated these objects ; yet in that moment ages of

the past seemed to roll over his memory, and with a shudder he pictured to himself what might be the fate of all that he then beheld. Far different were the prospects of the city now, from those of the day which saw him a wanderer from her walls; and with a bitter sigh of regret as he dwelt upon this idea, Elphenor quickened his pace, as if in haste to atone by his presence for the evil his long absence might have aggravated. Hurrying forward, he had already crossed the open space of the Hippodrome, and ascending the long flight of marble steps which led to the imperial palace, entered a gallery, where those who sought an audience of the Emperor were accustomed to wait until summoned to his presence. It was still early; and as it was the intention of Elphenor not to demand a private audience, lest, after his long absence it might leave the cause and manner of his return doubtful, he seated himself in one of the alcoves of the gallery, and drawing his mantle partly over his face, appeared lost in meditation. The gentle murmur of a fountain, alone broke the stillness of the spot; but in a few minutes several persons entered at the other end of the gallery;

and Elphenor, raising his eyes, scanned the group which immediately surrounded a large, dark looking man, whom he recognised as his old enemy, Lucas Notaras, the Grand Admiral. He appeared at that moment as if in the act of disclosing some very important secret ; his large heavy brows were compressed into an air of peculiar gravity ; and, as he moved more towards the centre of the gallery, Elphenor could distinctly hear the conversation that ensued.

“ And so the successor of Alessandro, the Grand Chamberlain, is to be declared to-day,” exclaimed a small, thin man, on the right-hand of Notaras.

“ I am so informed by His Majesty,” replied the latter, with a profound inclination of the head.

“ I hope, Signor Notaras, you will remember your promise to me,” observed, significantly, the Signor Jacopo Doria, one of the chief of the Genoese merchants.

“ Nay, the office of *protovestiare* should be held by one of us,” interrupted the handsome young Greek, Demetrius of Ypsara ; “ you Italians are rich enough already,” he added, with a laugh.

“ The Chamberlain of the Emperor has always

boasted of a Roman lineage," replied Giulio Orsini, a haughty looking personage, who gazed upon the brilliant dress and smiling features of the young Greek Demetrius with ill-concealed disgust.

"Now by our holy mother," retorted Demetrius, "methinks it is a bad moment for any Roman to look for favour, after the ungracious reception poor Martino Vasario has been vouchsafed at Rome. I hope, Signor Giulio, you have not neglected to prevail on his Holiness to support your application for the Chamberlain's office."

"An Orsini needs but little support from others," observed Jacopo Doria, the Genoese, in a fawning tone; being inwardly convinced that the immense bribe the Grand Admiral had unhesitatingly accepted from him, would not fail of securing the appointment.

"Nay, we all need some support," exclaimed Carlo Ficino, the small, thin man, who had spoken first, and who was a rich Venetian goldsmith; "but of course," he added with more complacency, as he recollected he could boast of being connected with the family of the Doge, "a place of so much importance will only be entrusted to one of noble

birth. Poor Alessandro, few could boast of uniting so many advantages as he did in his own person;" and with an appealing look at the Grand Admiral, who was nearly related to the deceased Chamberlain, whom no one before had ever thought of praising, Carlo Ficino heaved a deep sigh.

"My friends," said the Grand Admiral, pompously, "I need not now inform you, that His Majesty has ever placed in me the most unbounded confidence."

"We all know that, Signor Notaras," replied several voices.

"At least, so you have told us very often before," boldly observed Demetrius, whose natural and somewhat rash gaiety of manner could not be subdued by the assumed importance of Notaras.

The grand admiral did not deign to reply otherwise than by a frown; and turning his eyes with a meaning look to the Genoese, whose gold he had received, continued—"You must be aware that it is His Majesty's most anxious desire that his old and attached allies of Genoa—and of Venice," he added, with a smile that was not lost upon

Carlo Ficino, "should ever be called to bear their part in all the great offices of state, though some evil-disposed persons have ventured to insinuate that a natural partiality for his fellow-countrymen of Greece, has sometimes weighed against the claims of the noblest of the Romans."

"I must confess, that I think His Majesty's appointments show a most impartial spirit," observed the Orsini, who, remarking the stress which Notaras had laid upon the last words, already fancied himself Grand Chamberlain.

"Yes, yes; we all know the Emperor is the most noble and generous prince on earth," exclaimed Demetrius; "a prince," he added, with enthusiasm, "worth living or dying for; so you have not told us any news, Signor Notaras: but since His Majesty has placed in you such *unbounded confidence*, perhaps he has informed you who is to be Grand Chamberlain; and if so, I pray, in the name of all, that you will relieve our curiosity."

The group of aspirants gazed with anxiety upon the face of Notaras; but the latter, provoked by the manner in which Demetrius had ventured to mimick his words, and unwilling to

appear irritated at the folly of one whom he affected to consider as a boy, merely drew himself up, as he replied—

“ I am much grieved that it is not in my power to afford the Signor Demetrius the information he seeks. Doubtless, His Majesty will declare his intention at this morning’s council.” So saying, he turned towards the upper end of the gallery, and placed himself close to the door through which it was usual to pass to the council-room ; upon which several other persons, who had not ventured to address themselves to the little knot of favoured ones surrounding the Grand Admiral, advanced, and, in the murmur of general conversation which ensued, Elphenor could no longer distinguish a word.

He had, however, heard sufficient to inform him exactly of the state to which the absence of more worthy councillors had reduced the Emperor. The few, whose words he had overheard, were but a type of the many, who, in their factious and avaricious motives, entirely lost sight of aught, save personal aggrandizement ; and he foresaw that a strong and steady hand alone could now restrain

the turbulence of those, to whom the safety of the state might ere long be committed. Occupied with these reflections, it had not occurred to Elphenor that his own position at that moment was rather perplexing. It had been his wish to mingle in the crowd at the time it was summoned to the presence of the Emperor, thus avoiding all question or remark:—but already the usual hour had passed, and still the doors of the council-chamber remained closed. Elphenor hesitated for a moment—but the fact of having unintentionally overheard the conversation of others, determined him no longer to remain unobserved amongst them; and rising from his seat, he had just advanced to the gallery, when an unusual bustle at the opposite end attracted all eyes, the imperial guard ranged themselves rapidly on either side of the door, and, preceded by his officers, Constantine entered the gallery.

The surprise, not unmingled with consternation, which this departure from the ordinary routine of proceedings excited, was visible upon every countenance; and the assembled courtiers instantly advanced, ranging themselves as they walked on

either side. Constantine, however, did not appear to see them. Hastily his eye scanned the bowing crowd ; the face he sought was not among the many presented to his view, and a look of disappointment overspread his countenance ; until, turning to the right, he beheld Elphenor standing almost close to him. A smile of delight instantly lighted up features, that, even in repose, were strikingly handsome ; and pausing for a moment to accept the homage rendered to him by his former councillor, he held out his hand,—then leaning familiarly upon his arm, walked with him through the crowd, and placed him by his side at

sternation than the Grand Admiral himself; for, notwithstanding the hopes which he had continued to instil into the minds of others, until the last moment he had fully persuaded himself that the Emperor had yielded to his prayers, and was about to bestow the vacant place upon Alessandro Notaras, his only son. But the will of the Emperor was absolute; and a resolution thus declared at the council table, Notaras well knew was irrevocable. It was only when Constantine debated, and asked counsel, that any hope presented itself, that one of his moments of weakness was at hand; and Notaras stood too much in awe of the powerful mind of Elphenor, to venture an appearance of open opposition to him. He, therefore, during the time that the council lasted, contrived to repress all demonstration of the envy and anger with which his heart overflowed; and on quitting the chamber, no smile was more bland, no expressions more courteous, than those which met the eye and greeted the ear of Elphenor, from the lips of the wily Notaras.

Elphenor, though austere, was a man of polished address; and he replied to the endless congratula-

tions which assailed him on all sides, with the utmost graciousness of manner. It was only on great occasions he thought it necessary to be severe. His own interest, was a consideration of little moment ; but for Constantine, his sovereign and his friend, his heart was susceptible of the most lively emotion ; and the acute powers of discernment with which nature had gifted him, were doubly alive, when the interests of the Emperor were at stake.

The office of Grand Chamberlain at that time differed widely from the contemptible insignificance into which it afterwards sunk. A noble Greek or Roman would have thought himself for ever degraded, had the duties of this office resembled those of the present day ; the real privileges which the situation conferred, were of a far higher order, and more nearly resembled those enjoyed by a prime minister. In some respects, however, it differed materially. With a monarch whose will was arbitrary, all consultation with his ministers was of course voluntary on his part ; and though, since the accession of Constantine, the form of a council had been instituted, yet it was

not unusual that some sudden change of purpose took place; and it was then the duty of the Chamberlain to convey the wishes of the Emperor to the proper authority, and to hold himself responsible for their execution.

It was also necessary that the person who filled the office of Chamberlain, should be perfectly acquainted with the manners and customs of other nations—their language, form of government, and the resources of which they were capable; and this not only as far as the allies of the Emperor were concerned, but all those countries with which it had been brought, or was likely to come into contact. To preserve the correspondence with foreign powers, and register in the archives of the empire every event worthy of record, was another duty of the Chamberlain; and it may be supposed that the person who was intended to fill the office, was naturally sought for amongst the most intelligent, and educated men of an age, when the thirst for learning was at its height.

Added to this, the Chamberlain alone had his residence in the imperial palace, where a numerous retinue was appointed for his use. He also had

the right of access at all hours to the royal presence; and no appointments or rewards could be bestowed without his sanction and his seal. It was not surprising that a post, uniting so many advantages, should have been eagerly sought after, or that in the arduous duties it imposed, it should have been forgotten; or that in the short interval which had elapsed since the death of the last Grand Chamberlain, the secret hope which animated every breast of obtaining the vacant place, had rendered the court of Constantine a continued scene of underhand intrigue.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first decision of the Emperor was one which by no means accorded with the wishes of Elphenor. It was to send ambassadors to Rome and to Adrianople. The object of the mission to Rome was to solicit anew the interference of the Pope ; and, in order more fully to convince his Holiness of the good faith and true spirit of submission in which the promise was made, Constantine had instructed his envoy to declare, that the long deferred project of the union of the two churches should be immediately carried into effect, if the Pope would openly sanction the act, by sending a legate to Constantinople, to be present during the religious ceremony by which the union would be consummated. By this timely act of submission, the Emperor hoped to secure the appearance at least of that protection from the Holy See, which he knew, in the event of his being placed in

a situation of difficulty, would materially influence many of his allies in their conduct towards him.

In thus calculating, the good sense of Constantine had enabled him to form a just opinion ; but the judicious policy of this step was more than counter-balanced by the extraordinary determination with which he adhered to his plan of also sending an ambassador to the court of his powerful, though not yet openly avowed enemy, Mahomet II. It was a difficult and a dangerous undertaking ; and in vain Elphenor endeavoured to dissuade the Emperor from adopting it. No act of sufficient hostility to warrant reprisals had as yet taken place between the Greeks and the Ottomans. To ask for peace, where war had not been declared, was palpably an injudicious measure ; yet such was the anxiety of the Emperor to avert, if possible, the storm which he felt was gathering round him, that he could not rest, and eagerly caught at the first occasion which presented itself, of opening a negotiation with the Sultan ; vainly hoping, that if no other benefit resulted from the measure, he might at least ascertain the real feelings of the Ottoman court towards himself, and also discover

whether the reports which had lately reached him, of the extent of the warlike preparations of Mahomet, were well founded.

Some depredations of a serious nature had been committed by the Turkish soldiery upon the inhabitants of a small Greek village adjoining Constantinople. All redress having been refused by the Ottoman general, Constantine resolved to profit by the opportunity, and send a messenger to Mahomet, demanding an investigation of the affair; and at the same time offering a renewal of all the promises of friendship and goodwill which, notwithstanding the secret designs of the Sultan, had been constantly interchanged between him and the Emperor.

With unshaken firmness Constantine persevered in this scheme, although secretly forced to admit that the step was hazardous; but such was the importance he attached to its success, that he selected Elphenor as his ambassador. Elphenor, however, better informed than his sovereign as to the real disposition of the Sultan, immediately set before Constantine the danger he was about to provoke, and the advantage which Mahomet would not

fail to reap from this display of weakness. All was unavailing. The measure had long been a favourite scheme of the Emperor; and, from the determination of his manner, Elphenor fearing that if he were positively to decline the embassy, it would be entrusted to one perhaps less fervently devoted to the interests of his country, reluctantly accepted a commission, from which he judged too truly that little benefit could result. Such was the feverish impatience of Constantine for the realization of his hope of extorting from the Sultan some concession, or promise, which might secure peace between them, that he insisted upon the immediate departure of Elphenor for Adrianople, where the Sultan then resided; and preparations were instantly begun, in order to arrange and adorn the gorgeous train by which the ambassador of the Emperor was to be accompanied.

The will of an absolute monarch is as the touch of a magician's wand. In a short time, a magnificent retinue was prepared. Gifts from the royal treasure were selected as suitable offerings to the barbarians they were intended to appease; and the armoury of the Imperial palace rendered up all

that was most precious and dazzling within its walls, to adorn the troops which were to serve as the escort. In three days all was completed, as if by enchantment; and from the throne in the Hippodrome, from whence the emperors were accustomed to behold the celebration of the public games, in the magnificence of which Constantinople still stood unrivalled, Constantine now looked down, with an almost childish delight, upon the splendid cavalcade which was to set forth the following morning; but which first, by his orders, displayed its grandeur to the eyes of the admiring citizens, who flocked in crowds to view the procession as it passed along the open space of the Hippodrome.

Though grievously decayed from its ancient state, Constantinople still boasted of treasures of inestimable value; and all were now lavished by the anxious Constantine, in the futile hope that the magnificence of the embassy might convey a false estimate of the resources his empire afforded. The cavalcade which was to accompany Elphenor, resembled more the triumphant bands of a conqueror, than the train of a suppliant for redress and justice.

The march was opened by a troop of cavalry, in armour of Milan steel richly inlaid with gold. The bridles of the horses were heavily embossed with the same metal, which also glittered upon their light and beautiful breast-plates of chain armour. At the head of the troop rode the officers, mounted on superb steeds, also equipped for war; and with accoutrements of the most costly description. These were followed by a band of foot soldiers, who in their turn were succeeded by two rows of chariots, containing the musicians belonging to the Imperial palace, who kept up a succession of martial airs during the procession. After the musicians had past, the secretaries and physicians appeared, with the other officers who were to accompany the ambassador, all splendidly mounted and accoutred. Behind these, and distinguished by the simplicity of their attire, rode four of the chief of the holy men of Constantinople; two wore the habit of the Caloyers, and the other two were Latins.

But the chief attraction of the gay crowd that lined the Hippodrome to view the procession, seemed to be the magnificent horses which had

been taken from the Imperial stables, to swell the grandeur of the train. They were of the noble race which had been obtained at so much cost from the plains which lie at the foot of the Mount Argæus; a race so highly prized, that a celebrated rebel chief had been ransomed, and restored to his liberty and estates, by a sacrifice of some horses of the true Palmatian breed.

These horses, which were matchless for their splendid proportions and surpassing speed, were reserved solely for the Emperor and the imperial games; no subject was allowed to procure them, even from their own country, without informing his sovereign, who instantly commanded the purchase of the animal at any price, and thereby secured to himself the exclusive possession of the breed. Constantine was more proud of these animals than of any of his treasures; upon no other occasion had they ever formed a part of the retinue of any one save the Emperor himself; but having heard of the extreme value which the Sultan attached to this breed of horses, the Greek Emperor could not resist the temptation of displaying their beauty to the admiring eyes of the Infidels, and at

once decided that they should form part of the pageant, by which he hoped to delude the enemy into a belief of his wealth and resources.

Each horse was led by two grooms in the imperial livery. In order the better to display the extraordinary power and beauty of their form, they did not wear the deep embroidered housings which were used on state occasions; but only a light harness and bridle, from which depended two long reins, which were held on either side by the grooms. A plume of the most brilliantly coloured feathers was fastened upon their foreheads, sparkling, as well as the narrow harness which defined their shape, with innumerable jewels; while their long and flowing manes were confined at intervals by knots of precious stones and long pear-shaped pearls. Ten of these magnificent animals preceded, and as many followed the car of state which contained Elphenor. A column of infantry closed the brilliant procession; and a variety of attendants, tent-bearers, sumpter horses, and mules, brought up the rear, which was guarded by another small body of cavalry.

Never, even in those days, when the state consi-

dered the glory of its ambassador as its own, had so gorgeous a train departed from the walls of any city; and when the inhabitants of Constantinople beheld the magnificence of their Emperor, their love of show overcame all the feelings of anger with which his attempt to interfere with their religion had filled them, and a simultaneous shout arose from the countless multitude who lined the great arena, and thousands of voices invoked blessings on their sovereign, and offered up prayers for his success.

Nor was the name of Elphenor forgotten. The dignity of his virtue had endeared him to all who had the interest of their country sincerely at heart, and his recal to power was hailed by them as a good omen. The jealousy of individuals was lost in the general gladness, and the heart of the amiable and well-intentioned monarch bounded with joy, as he marked the favourable reception of him whom he loved as a father. On that day, all appeared to smile upon the sanguine Constantine; and retiring to his palace, after the bright pageant he had witnessed had dispersed, he gave himself up to hopes of the future, which, alas! only borrowed their lustre from the sunshine of his own breast.

Not so Elphenor ! Having at length escaped from the wearisome display, which he looked upon as the vain gilding of a sepulchre, he had hastened to quit the city, from which his final departure was fixed for the next day, and seek a moment's solace in the retirement of his own home, and the presence of his beloved Ida. 'Too truly had the heart of Ida foreboded that sorrow and anxiety would mingle in her portion of the destiny in which, by his reconciliation with the Emperor, Elphenor must necessarily be involved. Three days had elapsed without any tidings from Constantinople having been received at the villa. Was she, then, so soon forgotten ? It was the first time the heart of Ida had asked the question ; for it was the first time since her marriage that she had felt unhappy ; and as if the sense of separation from her husband made her cling still more fondly to her child, she had scarcely left the cradle in which Melanthe reposed. Oppressed by a vague sense of danger and of fear, she had continued to watch even during the night ; but it was not until the evening of the third day, as she was sitting beside her treasure, her pale face bowed upon her hands, that Elphenor entered the room.

Ida sprang from her seat, and, without speaking, buried her head upon the breast of her husband, as she clasped her arms round him. There was in that mute embrace such eloquence of love—such tenderness and truth, that it touched Elphenor more than the most passionate professions of attachment could have done. He felt that his absence had been mourned,—the moments counted until his return; and, as he pressed the loving form that twined around him still closer to his heart, it swelled with sadness, for he knew that his first words would bring tears to those eyes he dared not look upon in sorrow. In a few moments Ida raised her head, and leaning back upon the arm which encircled her waist, she looked up in the face of her husband with a trembling smile, as she said,—

“ You will not leave me again, Elphenor ? ”

“ Alas ! ” replied Elphenor, “ would that it were possible for me to remain :—but it cannot be ; this day—this very hour, we must part again. Nay, weep not,” he added quickly ; “ do not weep, my beloved Ida. It is the Emperor’s command. You would not wish that I should falter in my duty.”

“ That you could never do,” said Ida, proudly. “ I spoke in haste. But I have been so wretched in your absence. Why must we part ? ”

“ I will tell you all,” replied Elphenor ; “ and you will be the first to say, ‘ Elphenor has been right.’ ”

And when Elphenor had related the circumstances which had occurred, and the motives which had led to his acceptance of the office which must for a time separate him from his home, the murmurs of Ida were hushed. Once convinced, she no longer urged him to remain ; but her tears only flowed the faster.

CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning, Elphenor departed upon his mission. The journey to Adrianople was to occupy several days, and many were the imprecations called forth from the younger portion of the officers who formed the suite of the Ambassador, by the slow and stately mode of travelling, necessitated by so large and cumbersome a train. Among the most impatient of those who longed to endeavour to penetrate the mysteries of an Ottoman city, was the young Greek Demetrius of Ypsara. By the frank and spirited expression of his devotion and attachment to his sovereign, which had been unintentionally overheard by Elphenor in the gallery of the Imperial palace, Demetrius had so won upon his affections that he had been appointed one of the chief officers who were to accompany the Ambassador to Adrianople. Great was the jealousy which this preference had at first occasioned; for Deme-

trius had but just attained the age of manhood ; and from the extreme beauty of his person, and consequent attention to his dress and equipments, was looked upon by those not so bountifully endowed by nature as a mere boy, totally unfit for any situation of importance. But the eye of Elphenor had more discernment, and he soon discovered in the young Greek symptoms of a noble heart and undaunted courage ; and urged on by the sympathy which one fine nature instantly conceives for another, he had not hesitated to place Demetrius at once in a situation of confidence and honour. Each succeeding hour of their acquaintance, served to confirm the good impression which the youngman had made upon Elphenor ; and during the tedious days of their progress to the city of the Sultan, the harassed mind of the Ambassador seemed to repose with delight upon the freshness of thought and feeling which, in the fallen and depraved state of intellect which pervaded the Greeks of that day, so eminently distinguished Demetrius from his slavish and money-loving countrymen.

“ Had all who call themselves the sons of Greece, thy honesty and thy spirit,” said Elphenor to him-

self, " then, indeed, the powers of the fierce Mahomet would have little terror for the empire of the East !" And Elphenor looked mournfully on the glowing countenance of the noble youth who rode by his side, and listened to the ardent aspirations and generous hopes which broke from his lips, as he spoke of the high renown it was his ambition to obtain, and the glories of the empire, when it should have forced the haughty Sultan to submission, until he almost longed to have been able to exchange the deep foresight which his own learning and experience had given him for the happy confidence with which the joyous nature of unpractised youth looked forward to the uncertain future.

On the evening of the sixth day of their journey, Elphenor, with his train, found themselves within a short distance of Adrianople ; and the Ambassador having commanded that the usual preparations should be made for passing the night, proceeded, as was customary upon such occasions, to dispatch a messenger to the Grand Vizier, informing him of the approach of the Ambassador from the Emperor, and demanding an audience of the Sultan.

Calil Pacha, for so the Grand Vizier was named,

received this information as he was leaving his own palace to attend the summons of the Sultan; affecting surprise and consternation, he hastened to the Royal presence, and prostrating himself as one in the most abject fear, revealed the audacity, as he was pleased to call it, of a handful of Christians thus daring to present themselves at the Court of the Sultan of the Universe!

Little did Mahomet imagine that the news which Calil Pacha pretended to announce in fear and trembling, as an event totally unexpected, had been known to him from the very hour when the bright array of the procession had passed before the eyes of the Emperor Constantine. For some time, the traitorous Vizier had been in close correspondence with the Christians; and it was not without secret misgivings that he had learned the sudden determination of the Emperor to send an embassy to the Sultan. He trembled lest any accident might divulge his treasonable and underhand proceedings, to which in fact the measure of the Emperor might be in a great degree attributed, for the intense anxiety displayed by the Vizier to establish a good understanding with the Christians had led Constan-

tine into a false belief of the opinion entertained at the Ottoman Court of the power and resources of Constantinople.

If Calil professed this belief, it was not participated in by the superior mind of his Sovereign. Mahomet saw not through the eyes of his Vizier. Better informed as to the actual state of the empire, no sooner did he hear of the magnificent appointments with which the Christian Ambassador had arrived, than he instantly penetrated the shallow device, and exclaiming, "They have come to us like lions, but we will receive them like foxes," he gave orders that the most sumptuous preparations should be made for the reception of the Christian Ambassador and his train.

A palace was assigned for the dwelling of Elphenor; and some of the chief officers of the Sultan were commanded always to be in readiness, to show every attention to the strangers that was consistent with Turkish etiquette. An early day was named for the audience of the Ambassador; and even the Grand Vizier was deceived by the unusual tone of condescension which his sovereign had suddenly adopted towards his enemies.

The mind of Calil misgave him. Being constantly engaged in some intrigue for his own profit, he naturally distrusted the motives of others. Though Mahomet, who was unequalled in the art of dissembling, had always appeared to confide in him, the Vizier lived in a state of perpetual fear. He could not forget that, upon the abdication of Amurath, the father of Mahomet, in favour of his son, he had strongly opposed the coronation of that young prince, who had no sooner been crowned than he found Calil Pacha the most devoted of his slaves; but that when, a short time afterwards, it had pleased the former Sultan to emerge from his retirement, and remount his throne, Amurath had met with a strenuous supporter of the scheme in the person of the Grand Vizier. Although, in the double part he had played between the father and the son, he had merely consulted his own interest, and had not been actuated by ill-will towards Mahomet, Calil never fancied himself safe in the presence of his sovereign; and if a frown darkened the brow of the Sultan, the unfortunate Vizier became paralyzed with fear. He had amassed enormous riches, and would at any moment have

deserted to the Greek Emperor, could he have made terms sufficiently advantageous to himself. His surprise at the mode of reception vouchsafed by the Sultan to Elphenor was very great ; but lest he might in any way be suspected of favouring the Christians, he affected to deliver the sentiments of his master as totally differing from his own ; and in the first interview which he had with the Ambassador, he did not fail to reproach the servants of the Emperor for having ventured to insist upon the justice of their claims to redress, and unsparingly bestowed upon their whole nation those terms of reproach and vilification which were the customary offering of the Turks to those whom they affected to despise.

The true disposition of Calil was perfectly known to Elphenor, and he therefore quietly submitted to the treatment of the Grand Vizier, resolving not to hold communication upon matters of importance with any one but the Sultan himself.

The day which had been appointed for the audience of the Ambassador at length arrived, and he was ushered, with all the usual ceremonies, into the august presence of the Sultan. Never before

had anything so dazzling met the eye of Elphenor. The walls of the room which Mahomet had selected as his audience chamber, were of mother-o'-pearl, inlaid with gold, and precious stones of every colour; and whatever portion of the floor was left uncovered by the rich Persian carpets, appeared to be composed of lapis lazuli and porphyry, curiously inlaid with ivory and malachite, forming the most beautiful borders of arabesque design. The steps which led to the throne of the Sultar were all of ivory and gold; and the divan and cushions with which the room was surrounded were of the richest stuffs, brocaded with gold and silver.

The throne, upon which sat the Sultan, together with his own dress, were of a splendour which cast all surrounding objects into the shade; and even the canopy of crimson velvet above his head, was fringed with a deep border of jewels, and looped up in front with a massive chain of diamonds, above which sparkled a crescent, the light of which was so brilliant, that it dazzled the eyes of the beholders. Yet, amidst all this gorgeous display, one object alone seriously arrested the anxious eye of Elphenor. It was the glorious face

and form of the young Sultan, before whom the world had already begun to tremble.

Mahomet was at this time just two-and-twenty, and presented in his person a splendid specimen of manly beauty. Tall, and finely proportioned, with an air of majesty and command, which, in the meanest attire, would have distinguished him from all others, he had also been gifted with features of the utmost regularity. To those habituated to the usual cast of countenance among the Ottomans, the expression of the face of Mahomet must have been singularly striking. It never for a moment assumed the perfect stillness, which, from being so generally adopted, appears a national characteristic of the Turks. Even when silent, the fine dark eyes of the Sultan appeared to dilate and contract, as though an after-thought had suggested consideration of some step which he at first had meditated ; and then the half smile, which, for an instant, had revealed teeth of the most pearly whiteness, would settle down to a look of the sternest determination. But it was in speaking that the extraordinary powers of expression in the countenance of Mahomet more particularly developed themselves, and

the rapid changes which passed over it would have embellished the plainest features.

There were moments, however, when the stoutest heart trembled to look upon that face: moments, when the bitter scowl of ferocious passion showed that the unbridled spirit was at work within, and like the tempest-cloud struggling athwart the sky, foretold darkness and death! The extraordinary genius and acquirements of Mahomet had not left him in ignorance of any of the points of his own character; and although he never hesitated to practise the blackest arts of treachery and deceit, when they suited his purpose, yet so well aware was he of the policy of the appearance of honour and good faith, that he could at any time assume the semblance of honesty when convinced that his interests required it.

The character of this extraordinary man was the more striking, from being in many respects totally at variance with that of his own nation. The Turks were proverbial for profound ignorance and passive indifference. Mahomet, on the contrary, was susceptible of the most lively emotions. Restless and active, nothing escaped his observation.

and a just decision upon the most important points, with him was the work of an instant. In an age when reading and writing were almost unattainable accomplishments, even to the noblest of the land, Mahomet was not only thoroughly versed in the literature of his own country, but wrote and spoke with fluency seven or eight foreign languages. From his earliest years he had betrayed an insatiable thirst for knowledge—a just appreciation of all that was most sublime, whether in literature or the arts, and to be considered a patron of learning was to him an object of ambition.

With all these claims to admiration, the character of Mahomet was stained by vices of the deepest dye. He was cruel even to the most barbarous ferocity, false, sensual, and blasphemous; whilst he indulged in childish superstition. The acuteness of his mind very soon revealed to him the fallacies and impostures of the Mahomedan creed, while, in order to maintain a firmer hold over the mind of his people, he ever appeared the most zealous of the followers of the Prophet, performing his ablutions with scrupulous exactness,—avoiding the use of wine,—and minutely fulfilling every duty, which

was practised by the most rigid Mussulman. By this profound hypocrisy, he could deceive the multitude ; but an intellect like that of Mahomet, could not be convinced by forms ; and the result of the utter contempt in which he held the religion he professed, was an equal disbelief in all others. Had the marvellous powers of mind which he possessed been enlightened and directed by Christianity, there is no doubt that Mahomet would have been a good as well as a great prince ; but amidst the darkness of Mahomedanism, those very powers only served as incentives to the deeds of atrocity by which his career was stained, owing to the advantages the superiority of his intellect, released from all restraint, enabled him to take over the rest of mankind.

Such was the Prince before whom Elphenor now stood ; and it needed but one fiery glance of the young despot to convince those upon whom it turned, that any attempt to trifle with, or impose upon him, would be vain. Upon this occasion, however, the necessity for dissembling was upon his side. To beguile and amuse the Greek Emperor with fair words and promises, until his own prepa-

rations for war were further advanced, was the first object of the wily Mahomet. With a smile of the utmost benignity he received the address of Elphenor; but when the interpreter of the latter, according to the usual custom, was proceeding to translate the message of the Ambassador into the Turkish tongue, the Sultan by a hasty gesture stopped his speech; and at once with the greatest ease and fluency delivered his answer in the language used by Elphenor, accompanying his words with gestures full of grace, and a tone of condescension which filled the heart of the latter with dark forebodings.

Nothing could exceed the surprise of all the attendant officers of state at this unwonted reception of the Greek Ambassador. Hitherto, they had been accustomed only to the usual mode of audience, which was discourteous in the extreme, the Sultan generally sitting as though he did not understand one word of what was said to him; and after it had been explained by the interpreter, merely vouchsafing a few syllables, in a tone of offended dignity. The sudden change in the manner of their sovereign was most unaccountable; but to the grand Vizier it was perplexing to such a degree, that to

repress all outward sign of the agony of mind he endured, was impossible.

Calil Pacha was a thick, short man, with a smooth, red face, and scanty grizzled beard. He squinted slightly with both eyes; but, when excited, this defect became painfully apparent. Turkish etiquette forbids the slightest demonstration of emotion of any kind, in the presence of the Sultan. Though versed by long experience in all the arts of courtly deception, the unfortunate Vizier no sooner perceived that by the present disposition of his master towards the Greeks, not only his own avaricious views might be destroyed, but also that there was imminent danger of his traitorous practices being brought to light, than all presence of mind seemed to abandon him. He remained in his place trembling from head to foot; his eyes turned with the most horrible squint towards every person present, and the perspiration fell in large drops from his beard. He was very asthmatic, and in his efforts to restrain the inclination to cough, which his hurried breathing provoked, his face assumed almost a purple hue, and with lips apart he gasped for breath.

Once only the eye of the Sultan fell upon him. Fortunately the glance was not repeated, or the agitated Vizier must have sunk to the ground. Mahomet, whose eagle eye detected the smallest change of countenance in those around him, had instantly marked the confusion of Calil, and as instantly determined not to provoke the observation of others, by appearing to notice it, reserving for some future opportunity the heavy punishment to which he destined his victim, should he find his suspicions of his fidelity realized. At that moment, however, Calil was useful; and the mind of Mahomet was too full of the grand enterprise he meditated, to allow him to occupy himself with minor details.

His first object was, if possible, to delay the return of Elphenor to Constantinople, and, to effect this, he made use of a singular device. As soon as he had received the message of the Emperor, and replied to it in the most gracious words, he communicated to Elphenor a wish he had long entertained, and which from its trifling nature he felt assured would readily be granted by Constantine. This was—the cession of a very

small portion of land upon the shores of the Bosphorus, within a few miles of the city of Constantinople. To the exact situation of the spot he appeared indifferent; and upon observing the hesitation of Elphenor, ere he replied to this extraordinary demand, the Sultan unbound the splendid shawl which girded his waist, and throwing it on the floor declared his willingness to accept of even as small a portion of land as could be covered by that shawl, in order, as he said, to be able to place even a stool where he might sometimes sit to enjoy the beauty of the scenery for which the environs of Constantinople were so celebrated.

Elphenor plainly saw that some meaning of terrific import lurked beneath the apparent simplicity of this prayer. He instantly replied, that to grant or refuse such a request was not within the limits of the powers with which he had been entrusted by his Sovereign;—that the wishes of the Sultan should be forthwith conveyed to the Emperor of the Greeks;—and that he himself would await at Adrianople the return of his messenger. This was exactly what Mahomet desired; and im-

mediately after the customary exchange of presents had been made, he broke up the audience, and retired to his palace, well pleased with the advantage which he felt he had obtained.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was at the delicious hour of sunset, when the fair Chezmé, daughter of Calil Pacha, the Grand Vizier, quitted the walls of her father's palace to enjoy the freshness of the air on the banks of the river Maritza, which flowed at the bottom of the garden. Wrapped in her silver veil she proceeded alone to the kiosk which had been built expressly for her, in the most retired and shaded spot of that beautiful

The maiden, who now entered the kiosk, or summer house, situated in the midst of the garden, was the only daughter of Calil Pacha; and from the fierceness of her temper, and her imperious disposition, had obtained so complete a dominion over her weak and unprincipled father, that she enjoyed a liberty and absence of control, far beyond that which was permitted to the other inmates of the harem, or to Turkish women in general. The room in which she seated herself on entering the kiosk, was raised a few steps from the ground; and owing to this circumstance, commanded a better view of the garden and river. The roof was in the form of a cupola, and was supported by marble columns, of which a second row formed as it were the outward walls of the building. A gilded lattice work filled up the space between the pillars, and being covered outside with a variety of fragrant creepers, presented a wall of flowers impervious to the view of those who stood without. The lattice could only be opened from the inside; and in several places the roses and jessamines were carefully twined aside, so as to leave full space for the view of the fair occupants of the apartment. A large marble foun-

tain played in the middle of the room; the choicest singing birds, confined in aviaries of golden wire in different parts of the garden, filled the air with their sweet warbling; while the glow of an Eastern sunset tinged every flower with a still brighter hue than it was wont to wear.

Yet the lady who looked upon this scene of enchantment marked not its brightness—perhaps the small and jewelled mirror which she held in her hand, and not unfrequently consulted, had revealed to her that a tinge of a still warmer hue than that of the declining day lingered on her own cheek. As she leant back upon her cushions, she threw off the veil, whose gossamer weight seemed too oppressive for one evidently labouring under deep emotion. Once again she raised the little mirror which was suspended to her girdle by a row of amber beads. A smile of complacency hovered on her lips. Every art that could be summoned to the aid of much natural beauty, had that day been put in requisition by the fair handmaids of *Chez moi*. The countless braids of her long black hair nearly reached her feet; on one side of her head she wore a small cap of crimson, flowered with gold.

and silver, from which hung, almost upon her shoulder, a splendid tassel of rubies and diamonds. A heron's plume was gracefully placed on the other side, and fastened by several bodkins of gold, the heads of which were composed of jewels of a magnificent size and lustre. Her drawers were of pale amber damask, flowered with silver; the same material had been employed for the caftan, which fitted closely to her shape; the sleeves of the caftan were clasped with sapphires. Her waistcoat was of violet satin, sewn with pearl; and the light white gauze *chemise* which, though drawn carefully over her bosom, perfectly revealed the smallest of the blue veins which now seemed to swell with uncontrollable emotion, was buttoned with large emeralds and diamonds. Slippers of white satin with the most delicate gold embroidery, and a girdle enriched with jewels, completed the magnificent costume in which the fair Chezmé hoped to accomplish the unhallowed wish of engaging the affections of a stranger and a Christian.

Happily for her she was the Vizier's daughter—no other dared to have contemplated such a scheme; and even Chezmé ever and anon cast a

glance of terror upon the blue wave of the Maritza, as she recollected that a dreadful death beneath its rolling waters might, notwithstanding her power, be even to her, in the event of discovery, the fearful alternative of success. The consciousness of authority soon restored her self-possession; and as she marked the slanting sunbeam which told of the declining day, a look of anger and scorn chased away the expression of anxiety her countenance had hitherto worn. She rose from her seat, and stamping her foot upon the marble floor, hurried up and down the room, peeping out from every quarter through the flowery screens, and sometimes tearing away

features attempted to soften themselves into an expression of interest as she looked upon the disturbed countenance of Chezmé, addressed a few words to her as she passed the portale of the harem; and following her to her room, busily employed herself in arranging the cushions upon which her young mistress threw herself with an air of fatigue. Upon a sign from her, the old woman clapped her hands, and there immediately entered from the lower end of the room, twenty of the most beautiful young girls it was possible to behold. They were all richly dressed, but without jewels, for they were slaves of the imperious Chezmé, who now ordered them to dance and to sing for her amusement.

The room in which they were assembled was paved with marble of various colours, and the walls glowed with the brightest flowers enamelled on china of Japan. The ceiling of wood was also richly painted and gilt, and two fountains threw up streams of perfumed water, which fell into marble basins at the lower end of the room. The upper end was raised by steps, upon which ran a divan, or sofa, the cushions of which were

of gold and silver brocade; but those which the officious black slave had placed beneath the head of Chezmé were of white and blue satin with embroidery of gold and silk. A slave kneeling on either side fanned her gently with large flat fans of peacocks' feathers, perfumed with sandal wood and attar of roses. By degrees, the irritation which she had at first displayed, began to subside; and the tender and languid movements of the dancers as they glided before her, accompanied by music of the softest description, gradually soothed her passion. The fire of her bright black eyes became subdued, their long lashes drooped upon her cheek, as, with her head thrown back and lips half parted, she reclined upon her cushions until, lulled by the perfumed atmosphere and sweeter sounds, a gentle state of repose stole over her wearied spirit.

But Chezmé was not asleep—bright visions of hope flitted before her half-closed eyes—a home in a distant land—a land of liberty and love, with one as graceful and young as him on whom her whole soul was fixed, was the waking dream of the Vizier's daughter, whose superior intelligence and

aspiring soul loathed the confinement of the harem, and the prejudices to which she, although its queen, was a slave as abject as the meanest of those whose very lives depended on the breath of her own caprice. She did not sleep, though she dreamed—the happy dream of escaping from that fate to which she well knew the avarice and ambition of her father destined her; for the Vizier never neglected any opportunity of advancing his interests, and his design with regard to his daughter had not escaped her penetration.

As yet the Sultan had but one wife. He had married the daughter of an Emir (Solyman), a gentle, helpless girl, who trembled even beneath his smile. The haughty spirit of Chezme was fitted to rule a monarch, and the crafty Calil only waited for a favourable opportunity to endeavour to accomplish his scheme. Already the fame of the beauty of Chezme had reached the ear of the Sultan; and an exaggerated statement of the few accomplishments she possessed, had distinguished her from the inmates of the harem, who were all contented to remain in the most barbaric ignorance; so that the flatterers of the Grand Vizier did not

hesitate to pronounce the elevation of Chezmé as certain, when Mahomet should have once beheld her.

With a soul bursting with rage and bitterness, Chezmé had listened to these prophecies, resolving, in her own mind, that they never should be fulfilled. Had she been chosen as the first and only wife of the Sultan, then, indeed, her warmest ambition had been gratified. To rule, and to rule alone, was her waking thought and her midnight dream ; but to be confounded amongst the soulless tenants of a harem—caressed at one moment, then cast aside as worthless the next—to pine and wither in her

seemed to break in upon her mind ; and as she grew, and the powers of a precocious intellect were strengthened, a strong distrust of the truth of the religion of her fathers filled her heart, until it yearned to throw off the trammels of the dark and narrow creed her own good sense taught her to spurn.

In secret she had endeavoured to learn from her nurse the first rude elements of Christianity ; but her preceptress was an ignorant and uneducated woman. She taught the anxious Chezmé the little that she herself knew, but upon all the points which most interested the inquiring mind of her nurseling, the poor woman was lamentably deficient ; and dying before Chezmé had attained her fourteenth year, the mind of the unhappy girl remained in a perfect chaos of ideas upon all religious subjects. Every feeling of her impetuous nature partook of this unsettled state of mind. In hope, in trust of a divine protector, in horror of the degradation to which all the women of her nation blindly submitted, Chezmé was a Christian. This was chiefly because such trust suited with her own naturally noble and confiding sentiments.

Her ideas of Christianity had not taught her the smallest meekness, forbearance, or charity ; and hatred, revenge, in the unrestrained indulgence of luxury, and gratification of vanity, Chezmé surpassed even the most sensual of the burning climate to which she owed her birth. With these sentiments, no idea of duty interfered to restrain her hope of escape from her present thralldom. Every plan which her fertile brain could devise, was discussed between her and her faithful slave Ayba, a young Albanian girl, who had been taken prisoner in the late war, and presented by the Vizier to his daughter. Ayba had come from the same land as the nurse of Chezmé ; and the fond recollection which she cherished of one whom she had really loved, induced the haughty Chezmé to relax from her usual pride, and admit, as a friend, the slave who had been given to serve her. They soon became inseparable ; and Chezmé only waited for a favourable opportunity to confide to her faithful Ayba the thought which was ever present to her mind. In the meantime, she made a pretence of dispensing with her usual state, and constantly quitted the harem attended only by

Greek slave, that her doing so very soon ceased to attract the attention of her guards.

The disguise in which the Turkish ladies are forced to appear when they leave their houses, was peculiarly favourable to the design of Chezmé. Wrapped in the impenetrable *feridgee* and *yashmak*, with her pretty slippers concealed by a pair of clumsy yellow boots, the daughter of the Vizier, accompanied by Ayba in a dress so exactly the same that it would have been impossible to have distinguished them, constantly loitered away the day in the bazaars and shops of the city. The Mahomedan laws, by which no man dares to stop a woman in the street, should he even be certain that the veiled figure is his wife or daughter, secured them from insult or intrusion; and no obstacle presented itself to her instant evasion, but the selection of her new place of abode: still this, to an inexperienced girl, presented a serious difficulty; and day after day, the ardent Chezmé had returned to her gilded prison with a heart full of hope, though weighed down by present despondency.

One day, as they were thus sauntering along the

street, their ears were suddenly assailed by the unusual clamour of voices issuing from the shop of a neighbouring Jew ; and drawing near, in order to ascertain the cause, they learned, to their astonishment, that the Christian Ambassador was about to make his entry into Adrianople. The curiosity of Turkish women is unbounded ; and notwithstanding the grave remonstrances of Ayba on the danger, as well as impropriety of their encountering the crowd, which already had begun to collect in the streets, Chezme was resolute in remaining where she was ; and sheltering themselves, as well as they could, behind a pile of goods

that one look had sealed the fate of both, and bound up his own within it.

Thoughtful and silent, Chezmé returned to her palace, but from that hour one thought alone filled her breast. To seek out that youth, whose glance had filled her whole soul with love, and make his affections her own, was her instant determination; and not withheld by any motives of delicacy or shame, the accomplishment of the first part of her intention was easy.

The great object of curiosity she well knew to all strangers were the bazaars; and before Demetrius had been many hours in Adrianople, she had already spent moments in his society, which but too deeply confirmed the impression which his first appearance had created. Day after day were the same arts practised, until the times of their meeting were no longer left to chance; and Demetrius, forgetful of the danger, gave himself up to the pleasure with which these stolen hours inspired him. To the young Greek, there was a mystery attending the shrouded figures which ever hovered on his path,—which attracted him irresistibly towards them. One of them was evidently a

Greek ; still the foreign accent of the other, though she spoke the language perfectly, excited his utmost surprise.

In spite of the closeness of their disguise, the women of the East have ever some manner of discovering to their admirers that they are neither old nor ugly, and Demetrius was not long in ascertaining this fact ; but any attempt at finding out their names, or place of residence, was impossible. The peremptory tone of Chezmé, as she forbade him to follow her, instantly annihilated the presumptuous hopes which her words and manner, and constant appointment for the meeting of the next day, had raised in his bosom :—indeed, to follow any one of the muffled figures through the tortuous and crowded streets of a Turkish city, where hundreds of women, all disguised alike, are to be seen, would have been almost an impossibility.

Several days had been consumed in this manner, and Chezmé, whose whole thought was for herself, forgot that there might be more than one danger in the course she was pursuing. Accustomed to consider the presence of Ayba chiefly as a measure of convenience, her haughty mind never for an

instant contemplated the possibility of any interference from her slave, and she had therefore unhesitatingly admitted her to all her meetings with Demetrius; until Ayba, whose heart was equally susceptible with that of her mistress, resigned herself entirely to the delight with which the acquaintance of the young stranger had filled her.

In her eyes, he had one perfection which could scarcely have had the same power of attraction in those of Chezmé. He was Greek. None but the exile and the slave can fully comprehend the magic of the name of that country from which they have been torn. Surrounded by difficulties of which the affection of Chezmé formed one of the principal, Ayba did not dare openly to question her fellow-countryman, or seek his sympathy for the misfortunes which had deprived her of liberty and home. Oh ! how she longed for an interview, even of a few moments, when she might pour out her sorrows to his ear. Once this thought had taken possession of her mind, she nursed it, until persuaded that no evil could arise from the gratification of her desire; and that it was equally the desire of him upon

whom her every thought was now fixed. The moment for the execution of her project was not far distant. Once determined, she would not pause; and as in the crowded street the watchful eye of Chezmé was for a moment averted, Ayba contrived to whisper, as she glided to the side of Demetrius, "To-night at midnight, in the gardens of the cemetery by the bridge of the Maritza."

And that night, and many succeeding ones, did they meet in the beautiful gardens by the river side. The waters murmured at their feet; the tall cedars spread their branches thick and dark, like a canopy above, until the glimmer of the gentle stars scarcely pierced the leafy screen, though

a love as fervent, and as wild, as that which thrilled through the proud heart of the daughter of the Vizier.

Ayba thought not of the future. The present was too full of joy. Faithful, however, to her mistress, though regardless of herself, she had resisted every entreaty of Demetrius to reveal the name of her whom she served; and it was only when Chezmé, having fully made up her mind to the consequences, had determined upon disclosing to the young Greek, not only her name and station, but also her intention of flying from her country, that Ayba was suddenly awakened to the painful and dangerous position in which she stood. Fond, passionate, and unhappy, the poor girl had never thought of herself; and when the haughty Chezmé, resuming her pride on imagining herself secure of the affections of Demetrius, determined no longer to seek him,—sent Ayba to reveal the secret of her state, and concert with him the means of visiting her in all her splendour, the wretched slave was so overwhelmed by the prospect of her misery, that she stood before Demetrius weeping bitterly, and was for a long time totally incapable of acquitting

herself of her message, or returning to dispel the anxiety of her mistress.

It was this delay which had produced in Chezmé the fit of irritation and ill-humour, from which she had suffered so much during her anxious watch in the kiosk. It had been arranged that Ayba should seek her there on her return from her interview with Demetrius; but the tedious day had worn away, and still Ayba came not. Many an hour since had passed, and the fretful Chezmé had wearied of the song and dance of her beauteous slaves, when, pale and wan, and with a trembling step, Ayba entered the apartment of her impatient mistress. Springing from the cushions upon which

CHAPTER IX.

“WELL, what has delayed your return?” exclaimed the impatient Chezmé; “Will Demetrius come? what said he? Speak—speak,” she continued wildly, without giving her hearer time to reply.

“Lady,” began the trembling Ayba; but, on beholding the eagerness of Chezmé’s glance, a jealous pang shot through her heart, and she gasped for breath.

“You are fatigued—you have had to seek him at a distance; sit down, sit down, my good Ayba,” said her mistress; and, forgetting her usual state, she placed her slave on the cushion by her side.

“It was long before I could meet with him; he did not come to the bazaar, and I went to the square of the fountain,” faltered Ayba, catching the idea of Chezmé for an excuse.

“But what said he?—How did he look, when he heard it was the Vizier’s daughter who loved

him?" inquired Chezmé, with an involuntary glance of pride.

"He seemed surprised," replied Ayba, "and bade me remember the danger that awaited you as well as himself, should it even be suspected that he had visited you."

"I am grateful for such care," replied Chezmé, with a look of contempt; "but what else did he say?"

"He asked if you were not beautiful as the day; for that the fame of your charms had reached his ear in his own land."

The brow of Chezmé brightened as she listened to this well-timed flattery; and Ayba, who in

woman," exclaimed Chezmé, pettishly, as Ayba detailed the scheme that she had planned with Demetrius, for introducing him into the forbidden precincts of the harem.

"No other has a chance of remaining undiscovered," humbly suggested Ayba. "It is true, he might reach the bottom of the garden by the river, but the balustrade is so high above the water, that it would be impossible to climb over it without a ladder, and where are we to get that? Hussein, the Bostanji, always takes his away with him, when he has done nailing up the flowers against the kiosk;" and Ayba, who doubtless had well considered every possible plan for admitting the stranger privately, before she had adopted the hazardous one of absenting herself from the harem at night, again urged the disguise of a female, as the most practicable device.

"Well then, if he wishes it—and you advise, I suppose it must be so," slowly replied Chezmé, whose soul revolted from the idea of her lover appearing for the first time in her presence, in a disguise so ill suited to his noble and somewhat martial bearing.

“ But when will he come? Did you not appoint a time for our meeting?” asked Chezmé.

“ He waits at the shop of the Jew Levi, near the corner of the bazaar,” replied Ayba, with alacrity, her face beaming with delight at the thought of having once more to seek the presence of Demetrius.

“ Then go to him—be quick, Ayba—nay, loiter not as you have done before to-day, but bring him here; and if the slaves who guard the door make any resistance, show them this ring, and say it is a holy woman, their lady would consult—a dealer in charms, that will protect me against the evil eye. Say what thou wilt, but bring Demetrius hither.”

Ayba pressed her hands to her forehead, then

In a much shorter time than she could have expected, the sound of approaching footsteps was heard; and Ayba appeared, leading in a figure which in no wise differed from the many that daily traversed the city, save in height; for the holy woman who knelt so lowly before the lovely queen of the harem was a full head taller than any who had ever before entered its walls. Chezmé could scarcely refrain from smiling, when she saw the awkwardness with which Demetrius endeavoured to manage the tortuous folds of his *yashmak* and *feridgee*; but the moment was too eventful to her to be thrown away upon trifles; and desiring Ayba to keep watch at the lower end of the hall, she was left alone with her lover, and at length consented to withdraw her veil.

The conversation of Chezmé, even while her person was disguised, had surprised and fascinated the young Greek; but now that it was permitted him to gaze upon her surpassing beauty, his senses were bewildered. He knew not which the most to admire, the beautiful lips, wreathed with a smile of affection, or the bright wit that flowed from them; or the startling independence of spirit that,

bred up in the thralldom of Turkish prejudices, could thus emancipate itself from them, and yet lose nothing of the queen-like dignity belonging to her state.

The quick-witted Chezmé was not slow to discover, that, in the position which Demetrius occupied, any attempt at connecting him with her intended flight from the harem would entail inevitable ruin upon both. In a few hurried words, Demetrius had explained to her the object of the Greek ambassador's mission to Adrianople; and Chezmé shuddered to think, that, ere long perhaps, her own father might lead the troops that would carry war and devastation into the land of him she loved. Seated upon a cushion at the feet of Chezmé, the young Greek had partly removed the disguise which sheltered him, and his ardent gaze fixed upon the glowing countenance of the Vizier's daughter, his whole heart was yielded up to the fascination of the moment, and his soul drank in deep draughts of love, such as never before had filled it.

In the sunny climes where these two fair creatures had first seen the light, love is often the offspring of a moment. The secrecy which must

ever be observed in meeting; the difficulty, the danger, all conspire to invest every love affair with a romance that is fearfully exciting; and the terrible punishment that awaits both parties, should any untoward discovery take place, is forgotten in the charm of those stolen moments which make a Paradise of earth. Nor does it unfrequently happen that an affection thus suddenly conceived, is more durable than such as have gradually arrived at maturity.

The women of the East have so seldom an opportunity of freely choosing for themselves, that, when such an event does occur, every thought and wish are centered in the object of their choice; and no longer irritated and galled by the compulsion which reigns in the harem, they continue to the end of their lives faithful and devoted to him they have first loved. Such a love as this, now filled the breast of the beautiful Chezmé; and as she listened to the vows of Demetrius, she resolved that no risk should prevent her from joining her fate with his. Night was advancing; the Muezzin's voice had long since called the last hour of prayer from the neighbouring minaret, ere Demetrius could tear

himself away. At length, however, having settled that the following evening they should meet again in the same manner, Chezmé no longer seeking to control her laughter, assisted her lover to arrange the disguise, which, had it not been for his stature, would have effectually concealed him.

It was not until he had reached the door of the apartment, that Demetrius recollected the presence of the unhappy Ayba; but as the tearful eyes of the poor slave glistened in the light, as she advanced to take his hand, in order to lead him through the passages towards the gate of the harem, the heart of Demetrius smote him, and he stood for a moment irresolute; but recovering himself, he quitted the presence of Chezmé without speaking. Tears choked the utterance of Ayba, and she proceeded in silence, until arrived at the outer court of the harem, she paused beneath the shadow of the portico, and clasping the hand of Demetrius within her own, she pressed it passionately to her lips.

“ Ayba, forgive me,” murmured Demetrius.

“ I do,” sobbed the poor girl; “ for when you said you loved Ayba, you had not seen Chezmé.”

Heart-struck by the sad humility of these words, Demetrius gently drew the trembling form of Ayba towards him, and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead ; a kiss of pity—of remorse—of kindness—but not of love ; and the passionate nature of Ayba revolted from its coldness. A shudder past over her, as she exclaimed,—

“ I am but a poor slave, an orphan, and an outcast in the stranger’s land. You will not betray me.”

“ Never,” replied Demetrius. “ I would perish sooner than breathe your name, save with affection and respect.”

“ Respect is not for Ayba, now,” said the poor girl sadly, while her cheek burned with blushes, and affection ; “ alas ! alas !” she exclaimed, wildly, as the words she had overheard, addressed by him she loved to another, recurred to her mind, and pressing her hands to her breast, her frame was convulsed with agony.

A deep sigh broke from the bosom of Demetrius, and bitterly did he curse the weakness and want of principle which had led him to profess a depth of love his heart did not feel.

"Ayba," he said softly, "Chezmé loves you. I will pray to her, and she will restore you to liberty. Once again in your own land, you will be happy."

"Never," replied Ayba, in a stifled voice, "where you are not."

"Do not say so," urged Demetrius. "Let me hope ——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Ayba softly, laying her finger on his lips, as the approach of footsteps was heard, and the dusky form of a watchman was seen crossing the court with a lantern in his hand.

With a noiseless tread, Ayba swiftly led the Greek along the inside of the portico. Had the

CHAPTER X.

At the appointed hour, on the following evening, Chezmé once again took her way to her kiosk in the garden, having determined upon receiving Demetrius there, in preference to her apartments in the harem. Attended by the obedient yet suffering Ayba, Chezmé had carefully arranged the interior of the summer-house, so as to present every object likely to please the eye and delight the senses of her visitor. The choicest perfumes burned in little golden lamps, placed in niches between the windows; tables loaded with delicious fruits were placed within reach of the divan; and the most refreshing liquids stood in vases of gold, enriched with precious stones. Sherbet, cooled with snow, conserve of roses served in golden spoons, the handles of which were set with diamonds, and every delicacy that was esteemed most rare by the fair

gourmandes of the harem, was now prepared with the greatest care.

Nor did this preparation excite the least surprise among the slaves and guardians of Chezmé. As was the case with all other females of her rank, within the walls of the harem, her will was absolute ; and except upon the one point of admitting male visitors, a breach of decorum and religious observance undreamed of in the daughter of the Vizier ; no fancy, however whimsical, troublesome, or expensive, excited either murmur or observation. An immense number of slaves, old and young, male and female, constantly waited upon the

of instinctive notion of comedy, generally ending in a lover's quarrel and reconciliation. The skill they displayed in some of these performances was far from being contemptible; and it had become one of the chief enjoyments of the Turkish ladies to entertain their visitors by a display of this kind, during the formal visits the inmates of one harem constantly deemed it necessary to make to those of another.

Often had Chezme, when wearied by such amusements, which had little charm for her whose mind was capable of more intellectual enjoyments, commanded that her evening repast should be prepared in the kiosk, and that all should retire except Ayba; and there, alone with her favourite, who, though uneducated, could talk with her of other scenes, and a world which she longed to behold, Chezme would while away the hours of her captivity in dreams of future days, whose brightness should compensate for the loneliness of her present lot. Now it seemed as though fate had heard her prayers, and that her vision of bliss was about to be realized; for whilst Chezme gave herself up to the happiness of that idea, she forgot to think of the sin which

she was committing, or the danger to which the slightest accident might expose her. She forgot all but Demetrius, and the delight of seeing him again; and when, at length, she heard the sound of hurried steps beneath the covered walk of woodbine and cistus which wound along the confines of the garden, she could scarcely restrain herself so far as to retire hastily within the kiosk, and take her seat upon the divan. Joy as well as grief is selfish to an absorbing degree; and Chezme, in the transport with which she half rose to receive her lover, marked not the look of anguish which tinged the pale cheek of her poor Ayba with a hue still more death-like than before, as she beheld Demetrius kneel before her mistress, pressing her jewelled fingers to his lips and heart, with a rapture that the unhappy slave well remembered had never marked his meetings with herself.

“He never loved *me*,” exclaimed Ayba, almost aloud; and the first bitter thoughts which had ever entered her mind against a mistress she adored, swelled the breast of the wretched girl almost to bursting. She could scarcely control herself sufficiently to perform the duties of attendance which

devolved upon her. It was a dreadful task ; and escaping from it as quickly as possible, Ayba sat down upon the steps of the kiosk, removed far enough not to overhear words which pierced her heart with anguish. Bowed down with grief, leaning her pale face upon her arms, she wept those bitter tears, which sooner or later ever flow when the path of virtue and rectitude has been forsaken ! and rendered doubly desolate by her own fault, the unhappy girl listened to the murmur of the waves as they rolled past, and sighed for that repose she madly resolved one day to seek beneath their bosom !

Suddenly she raised her head—another sound seemed mingling with the voice of the waters ;—it ceased—but no !—again it returns, and the affrighted Ayba springs to her feet. It is the sound of voices—loud and angry voices. Ayba steals to a thicket of magnolias and oleanders, which shelters the kiosk from view of the harem. Distraction ! Lights are gleaming from every window—slaves are running to and fro affrighted ; and the grim Ethiops of the Vizier's guard already line the court.

With the speed of light, Ayba regains the kiosk.

“The Vizier!—the Vizier!” was all she could utter; and overpowered by the idea of the certain fate of Demetrius, should he be discovered, she sank senseless upon the floor.

Not so, Chezme. Though pale as the marble beneath her feet, her presence of mind did not forsake her. Behind the divan where she sat, was a recess, concealed from view by a sliding panel in the wall. It had been originally intended as a place of safety for the rich cushions and other articles too cumbrous to be removed every night within the harem; and communicated by steps with the ceiling of the kiosk, so that in fact it led

rose in her accustomed manner, and kneeling on one knee before him, received his salutation upon her forehead. The countenance of Calil Pacha was livid with rage; his eyes seemed to squint into every corner of the apartment; and yet such was his trepidation, that he totally overlooked the crouching form of Ayba, who, having somewhat recovered, was kneeling in mute terror behind one of the pillars.

"Where is the accursed slave, by whom my harem is defiled?" asked he in a voice of thunder.

"What mean these words?" inquired Chezmé, in a well assumed tone of offended dignity.

"Bring forth the slave, I say; and let me wreak my vengeance on the spot, or, by the beard of the Prophet, I will slay every one within the harem walls," vociferated the enraged Vizier.

"My father's words are those of anger—his daughter listens but to obey," said Chezmé calmly.

"I will have vengeance—but why do I talk to a woman? the fault is mine, and my hand shall wash it away in blood. Oh! that ever I listened to thy prayer, and gave thee an accursed Christian for a slave."

The heart of Chezmé seemed to die within her at these words.

“ If any in my service have offended the Vizier, he has only to speak,” observed his daughter.

“ Offended me !—disgraced—defiled—spit upon my very beard,” roared the Vizier ; “ and it is thy favourite, thy Greek slave Ayba, who has brought this pollution upon our house. The Sultan will hear of it—then woe is me ! He will say, the mistress is no better than the slave,” continued Calil, whose chief cause of rage upon the occasion was the fear of its injuring his prospects with regard to his daughter’s promotion.

“ Not so, my father,” firmly replied Chezmé, who had her own reasons for not wishing that any examination of the timid Ayba should take place. “ My slaves are my own, to deal with as I think fit.”

“ Thou art no fitting judge of a crime so heinous,” replied the Vizier, in an uncertain voice, his contempt for the sex of his daughter mingling with his habitual awe of the determination of her character.

“ Most fitting,” said Chezmé, sternly ; “ when my father placed me at the head of his harem, my duties were made known to me—say, have I turned from them ?”

“ Nay, thou art a pearl of discretion, as well as a rose of beauty, fit only for the bride of a sultan,” replied the Vizier, who always ended in flattering his daughter, whenever she showed symptoms of rebellion. A smile of scorn curled the beautiful lip of Chezmé as she replied :

“ ’Tis well—wherefore seek, then, to disturb my dominion ? If I want aid, I will ask it ; but if my father loves his daughter, he will not seek to make the slaves of her harem subjects of ill report,

but rather conceal from every ear the shame that has fallen upon her. Withdraw your guards, and command that all instantly retire within the sleeping apartments.

“ I will question Ayba—if she is guilty, shall Chezmé stoop to screen her? Rather will I, myself, inflict the punishment she would so justly deserve.”

So spoke the proud Chezmé, in the full conviction of the innocence of her favourite; and restored to confidence by the turn the affair had taken, she received with calmness the farewell of her father, and making a sign to the trembling Ayba to remain concealed from his view, she herself conducted the Vizier to the door of the kiosk, and soon had the happiness of hearing him depart, immediately after which, a deep silence reigned in the garden. Returning to the kiosk, the daughter of the Vizier went straight to the panel which concealed Demetrius; and opening it, took from him the disguise which he wore, then leading him through the deepest of the shaded walks which skirted the garden, she did not pause until they stood upon the brink of the river.

“ Demetrius,” she said, in a low voice, “ you are saved ; but the danger of this night has taught me prudence—we must not meet again;—at least not here,” she added, seeing that he was about to contradict her words.

“ Not meet again,” exclaimed Demetrius, “ I would sooner die a thousand deaths than give up an instant of your society, my beauteous, my beloved Chezmé ——”

Chezmé cast her eyes to heaven with a look of rapture, and after a moment's pause, replied—“ One day we shall meet again—I feel it—I am assured of it ; for a secret warning has told me, from the first, that my fate is linked with your's. Nay,” she continued, looking fearfully around, “ I know it, for the stars have predicted it ; the very day after my eyes first beheld you, I hastened to consult the great Almanzor, whose prophecies have never been known to fail.”

“ And what did he foretel, as the fate of the beautiful Chezmé ?” asked Demetrius, with a smile, at the earnestness of belief which one so gifted could yet place in the words of an astrologer.

“ Nay, my name was a secret to him ; but he

told me my fate would be different from that of other women ; for that the star of my nativity was linked with one placed far away in the heavens. Demetrius—thou art that star—and we shall meet again.”

Again ! again ! oh, oft again, and to part no more,” exclaimed Demetrius, half induced, by the serious eyes which beamed upon him, to indulge in a superstition so prevalent in that age that few persons in the East were totally free from it.

“ It is that certainty,” said Chezmé, “ that will support me ; now promise that till that hour comes, no vow of love to another shall ever pass thy lips.”

“ I do—I swear it, by all that we both hold most sacred—by the heaven that is above us—by ——”

“ Enough,” said Chezmé, hurriedly ; for the thought of all that might intervene before she again beheld him she loved, was becoming too painful for endurance.

“ Enough—I believe—and I trust you. Wear this,” she continued, drawing a ruby ring from her finger, and placing it on the hand of Demetrius ; “ Chezmé will one day redeem her ring.” She

turned, and pointing to the river, whispered, "No other way is left for escape :—a few moments will bear you across the waves. Do not seek me again until you hear from me. Demetrius, farewell!" and Chezmé bent her head for the first time on the bosom of her lover.

Demetrius, as he pressed her frantically to his heart, did not see the tears that were rapidly falling down her cheeks. Another moment, and a heavy plunge struck upon the ear of Chezmé, who watched until she saw him she loved, safely ascend the flowery bank of the garden on the opposite side of the river ; and then, with a secret thanksgiving to Heaven for having escaped the dangers of the night, Chezmé returned to the harem.

CHAPTER XI.

ENGROSSED by her own situation, which certainly presented no small difficulties to her excited view, Chezme had been some time in her apartment unconscious of the presence of Ayba, who remained at the lower end of the room, mute and pale like a statue of despair; her hands clasped before her, and her straining eyes fixed upon the face of her mistress. At every movement of

of the world and its dissimulation, the idea might have suggested itself, that at all events it would be better to wait until she should be questioned, and frame her avowal according to what she found was the extent of the information possessed by her interrogator.

Ayba was the untutored child of nature. She had committed a sin, that, in her country and in the class of life to which she belonged, was not considered so heinous as in that land in which she was now a slave. She had given her heart unasked and unsought for, and had eagerly received a few common-place expressions of gallantry as a genuine return of her own true and passionate affection. Too soon had she learned that this was the case; and that the love of Demetrius was not as her love for him; and the bitterness of that discovery had at first overwhelmed all other faculties; but now, to her former griefs, the shame of exposure was added, and the little fortitude with which she had been gifted by nature, gave way before such an accumulation of distress.

With intense anxiety Ayba had watched from a distance the escape of Demetrius, and the return of

Chezmé to the harem ; and following silently, she had expected every instant to be called before her judge ; but the abstraction of Chezmé had deferred the moment, when, by a full confession of both her faults and her sorrow, Ayba hoped to have softened the heart of her mistress.

When the mind is intensely wrought up to the performance of any deed which it considers indispensable, delay is intolerable torture. The unhappy Ayba, during the time she stood as if awaiting the moment of confession, was a prey to this feeling in its most aggravated form. The tension of every nerve and sense became too strong for endurance, till at last it burst from her bosom in such a groan of anguish that Chezmé started, and, for the first time aware of her presence, called Ayba to her.

“ Lady—mistress—oh, forgive me—forgive the wretched, guilty Ayba !” exclaimed the poor girl, as she rushed towards Chezmé, embracing her feet, and prostrating herself till her forehead rested upon the marble floor.

“ How ?” said Chezmé, her look filled with horror. “ Guilty ! oh ! not guilty, my poor Ayba—all who are accused are not guilty ;” and she

stooped, and kindly endeavoured to raise the sobbing girl from the floor.

"It was all true—all that his Highness the Vizier said was true—all—and more than that," exclaimed Ayba, wildly tossing her arms above her head, as she knelt before her mistress.

"Nay—calm thyself, dear Ayba, I will not believe it:—thou canst not be so lost," said Chezmé, in a tone of agony.

"Yes—yes—it is true. I did meet him every night in the gardens by the new bridge over the Maritza. Oh God! those nights of happiness!" she exclaimed almost with a shriek, as she lifted a look of impassioned tenderness towards heaven. "But now," she continued, as an expression of deep distress replaced it, "I would not have them come again—oh no—I could not, even if I might——"

"Do not speak so wildly," said Chezmé; "but tell me how this happened, and how you could run so deadly a risk for one whom it would seem you cannot have known long——"

"You ask me how it happened," replied Ayba quickly; "Lady, ask thyself how it is that the first glance of the beloved one sinks into the heart

—how it is that the mind dwells upon that glance, till the soul sees it in all around—the air, the earth, the flowers—all beam with it; and then, when after days bring sighs and honied words, and half-breathed syllables, and the light trembling touch that sends the blood quick from the heart till every pulse is maddened into fire—Lady, how is it then, that all the world seems naught?—all blank—all desolate, but the one spot shadowed by the form we love—love, oh far too well to think of self? How is it then, that we forget all, but the one who taught us thus to feel? Lady, my words are bold—but ask me no more from whence has sprung

her, "I fear thy sin has been great; yet it is not for one who is herself so guilty to heap reproaches on thy head. Thou knowest that in this country the punishment is dreadful; even if sentence of death should not be pronounced, public exposure, with hard labour for life, is the most lenient that is ever accorded."

"Alas! alas! death were far better," sobbed poor Ayba.

"There yet remains one way of escape," said Chezmé. "If I give thee thy liberty, no one will inquire into the deeds of a free woman and a foreigner; thus thou mayest regain thine own country, or, at least, seek some other, where thou mayest be happy."

"Lady—mistress—angel—oh! how can the wretched Ayba thank thee for such words," cried Ayba, embracing the knees and feet of her mistress.

"The certainty of thy happiness and safety will be my best reward; and I shall need some, Ayba, for I shall miss thy kindness," said Chezmé, mournfully. "But tell me," she continued, "who is he for whom thou hast sacrificed so much?"

Ayba hung her head, and, covering her face with her hands, did not reply.

“ Why dost thou hesitate ? ” asked her mistress.
“ Once free, thou must seek him out ; if his heart is noble, he will remember all thou hast done for him, and Ayba may yet be a happy wife.”

“ Never ! oh, never ! ” murmured Ayba.

“ Nay, then I fear it is a love thou art ashamed to avow—some low-born slave—some ——”

“ No, Lady—no slave ! ” cried Ayba, almost fiercely, “ but noblest among the noble ! ”

“ Then name him,” said Chézmé, whose curiosity was strongly aroused by the hesitation of her

"Demetrius of Ypsara," whispered the trembling Ayba, but in so low a tone, that it scarce could reach the attentive ear of Chezmé.

"Demetrius!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, while her eyes flashed fire, as if they would have struck the trembling form of Ayba with instant death.

"Demetrius!—'tis false—thou darest not say it."

"It is true," said Ayba, meekly folding her hands upon her breast, "Ayba cannot lie to her mistress. It is Demetrius whom I have loved—and for whom," she added in a lower tone, "I have sinned."

"Slave—minion!" cried Chezmé, furiously, "how didst thou dare to lift thine eyes to one so much above thee, or imagine, in thy foolish heart, that he could stoop to such a thing as thou?"

"Lady," said Ayba, proudly, for she was stung to the heart by the contemptuous tone of her mistress, "I have said before, thine own heart, which now beats with love, can best reply to thy questions. Do with me as thou wilt—but, oh!

when I am dead, let my name be forgotten! do not speak it with scorn to—him—to Demetrius."

"Name him not to me," exclaimed Chezmé, "or I will strike thee dead upon the spot, thou vile, abandoned creature, that seekest to hide the shame, that doubtless thou hast long since known, beneath the shelter of his noble name." A cry of agony burst from the lips of Ayba, at this cruel accusation—and she cast herself at the feet of the infuriated Chezmé, sobbing so bitterly, her heart seemed almost bursting from her bosom.

"Say any thing but that—torture me, slay me,

sense and dignity, seized the unhappy Ayba by her long hair, and drawing forth a poniard she always carried beneath her vest, was about to plunge it into the bosom of the trembling girl, when some sudden thought seemed to change her intention, for she remained motionless, with her hand up-lifted. It was a terrible exemplification of the horror of unbridled passions, to behold these two women, formerly the delight of each other's existence, in the awful position in which they thus stood !

Chezmé, whose every movement when at rest was stately and queenlike, now glared upon her victim with the rage of a demon. The splendour of her dress contrasted fearfully with the contracted brow and compressed lips, which showed that there was intense suffering within ; and the marble paleness of that cheek, which a few moments before had glowed with the damask hue of the rose, made the fierce flashings of her large black eyes still more wild and fearful. Writhing under the accumulated torture of rage, wounded self-love, and jealousy so deadly, that it amounted almost to madness, Chezmé, as she seized the unhappy Ayba,

forgot their long friendship, and the helpless condition of her poor slave. Revenge was the only thought that could bring solace to her infuriated breast; and when she stood above her victim, who, still kneeling upon the floor, uttered but one feeble cry, as she bent her head backwards to receive the fatal blow upon her bosom, the thought that arrested the hand of Chezmé was not of pity or remorse!—it was the cold calculation of the fiendish spirit which at that moment possessed her, that, by inflicting instant punishment, she should lose the revenge of gloating upon the agony of her rival—which made her, as she gazed upon the haggard

standing at the door, she motioned to Ayba to enter. Trembling with apprehension, the poor girl obeyed; but when she saw her mistress preparing to lock the door of the room, she threw herself suddenly at her feet, and implored her to have mercy, and not to leave her to darkness and solitude.

“ Kill me at once; but do not leave me here! my heart is broken! I cannot bear to be alone,” cried the wretched slave, bursting into a fresh agony of tears.

“ It is dark,” said Chezmé, with a scowl of hatred that would have done honour to a demon; “ but not more dark than the cypress grove by the banks of the Maritza;” and with a violent effort she disengaged the folds of her dress from the grasp of Ayba, and, closing the door, in a moment afterwards the grating of the key upon the lock told the prisoner her doom. One wild scream of agony reached the ear of Chezmé, who, appalled by the torture of mind it revealed, half withdrew the key from her girdle, where she had placed it; but the cry was not repeated; and grinding her teeth as she murmured the name of Demetrius, Chezmé retired to her own apartment.

That night, no slave was summoned to attend their mistress, for during the long hours of darkness Chezmé continued to pace the room incessantly, her mind a prey to the most fierce emotion. At length, worn out by her own impetuosity, she sank upon a sofa, and the first fury of her passion having abated, the better feelings of her nature began to regain the ascendant; and a sentiment of pity for her unhappy slave crept into the bosom which had lately been filled only with hatred, and the desire of revenge. The acuteness of her perception enabled Chezmé to see at a glance all that had happened; and though a feeling of contempt

for Demetrius certainly arose within her heart, yet

ciple, from her own. To atone by kindness for the cruelty she had shown to Ayba, was her instant determination; but to devise some immediate plan for the future, was also an imperative obligation. If she hesitated, even for a day, the law might take its course, and her friend and favourite would be beyond her power. To make her the partner of her flight, after the disclosure of that night, she felt to be impossible; and having weighed the matter in every different form, she came to the conclusion that her original plan, of conferring liberty upon her slave, was in every respect the best. Satisfied with this determination, Chezmé, worn out with fatigue, at length threw herself upon her cushions, resolving, that her first act, on the following morning, should be to restore tranquillity to the tortured bosom of Ayba.

CHAPTER XII.

It was late on the following day when Chezmé awoke from the heavy sleep into which the events of the foregoing had plunged her. At first, her ideas were confused, but she was soon able to recollect distinctly all that had occurred; and starting from her couch, she hastened to undo the fastenings of the door, resolved not to lose a moment in seeking the presence of Ayba, and

to the presence of her prisoner, when a sound suddenly struck upon her ear, and caused her to pause.

It was a sound so unusual within the harem, that the cheek of Chezmé blanched as it reached her. It was a sound of lamentation and weeping, and of many voices; and as Chezmé descended the staircase, and advanced towards the court from whence it issued, she fancied she heard her own name pronounced more than once. Alarmed, though she knew not wherefore, she now pressed forward. It seemed as if every slave within the harem had collected in the court; and as the crowd opened on the appearance of Chezmé, a cry of horror, so frantic that beneath it every other sound was hushed, burst from her lips.

Upon the ground before her lay the lifeless body of the unfortunate Ayba! A frightful wound upon one side of her head, showed too plainly the manner of her death; and for the first time Chezmé remembered that the room in which she had been confined, communicated with the roof of the palace. The unhappy girl, as the hours wore on, and brought no prospect of

release had been unable to bear the torture of her own thoughts; and rendered frantic by the solitude she endured, had precipitated herself into the court below, and found upon its marble bosom, the death for which her misery had taught her to sigh.

"It is I who have murdered her," cried the wretched Chezme, as she threw herself on her knees by the body, and, regardless of the gazing throng, that shrunk back affrighted at her grief, she pressed her face upon the yet quivering lips of her poor slave, and raising the head upon her bosom, kissed away the tears which were still wet upon the cheek of Ayba.

But vain was all her tenderness; and useless now were the words she addressed to her whom she had so cruelly treated. Forgiveness came too late; and the crushed and wounded spirit had fled, before the balm of returning kindness could shed its sweetness o'er it. The eyes that would have beamed with gladness were closed—and for ever—In vain her mistress called upon her to awaken—in vain she prayed for one last look—one sign that she forgave her!—though gladly would the

haughty Chezmé have exchanged places with her slave the moment after she had pronounced her pardon. Ayba never spoke again. The small head of the poor Greek girl grew heavy on the sinking bosom of Chezmé—the graceful limbs began to stiffen, and the blood which at first had welled in a boiling stream from the wound, now slowly fell in thickening drops upon the gorgeous dress in which Chezmé had remained since the previous day. Colder and colder grew the form which was yet fondly clasped to the breast of one, who, with all her evil passions, still could feel more warmth of attachment than many more enlightened could boast; and it was not till a certainty so dread that none can withstand its power, forced itself on the mind of Chezmé, that she would yield up the treasure that she held. Once more she looked upon the face of her she had so loved in life—once more she tried to pronounce her name—the effort was beyond her strength; her senses abandoned her; she sunk upon the body, and alike unconscious of their last embrace, the living and the dead lay side by side!

CHAPTER XIII.

WHILE these events were passing within the walls of the harem, another, of more trifling appearance, yet closely connected with the fate of an entire nation, had occurred in the city of Adrianople. The messenger dispatched to Constantinople had returned, and delivered to Elphenor the answer of his sovereign, to the extraordinary request of the

of Elphenor, and all seemed to conspire to hurry on that fate, which perhaps, by timely caution, might have been averted.

It had been the earnest prayer of Elphenor, that he might be permitted to be the bearer of the request of the Sultan to Constantine; but Mahomet, who foresaw too well the result that would probably arise from the presence of Elphenor at Constantinople, refused his consent to such entreaty; and though he hated, even while forced to respect the upright, unbending nature of the Greek Ambassador, he pretended to have conceived a violent friendship for him, constantly detaining him near his person, and trying to beguile the time by shows and spectacles of a superb nature, in which the wealth and power of his kingdom were ostentatiously displayed to the eyes of Elphenor and his train. In this manner, many valuable days were lost, ere the messengers of the Sultan, who were to accompany those of the Ambassador, were pronounced ready for the journey. Arrived at Constantinople, and acting, no doubt, from instructions received before-hand, a considerable delay took place before they set out upon their

return, thus extending to several weeks an affair which might have been disposed of in a fourth of the time.

Harassed beyond endurance by a duplicity he could not counteract, Elphenor hailed the return of his messenger with a joy that was ill concealed from the searching eye of Mahomet; but this moment of delight was soon forgotten in the dismay with which the Ambassador received the orders of his sovereign. Not only did Constantine comply with the demand of the Sultan, but with a noble generosity, which spoke more for the kindly feelings of his heart, than for the soundness of his judgment as a statesman: he desired

The heart of Mahomet bounded with joy, as he perceived how completely his enemy had fallen into the trap he had laid for him, and he now willingly consented to permit the departure of Elphenor, to whom he sent presents of the most magnificent description ; appointing, at the same time, an hour on the following day for an audience, when the Ambassador was to take leave.

With a brow clouded with sorrow, Elphenor stood in his chamber, calmly watching the dexterity of the black slaves, as they entered his room one after another, and piled up the rich gifts of the Sultan, until the floor was covered with them. To have refused them openly would have been an offence not easily forgiven by an Ottoman Emperor ; and Elphenor felt that he had no right to provoke so powerful an enemy ; but to accept of the smallest trifle was a degradation to which he resolved not to submit ; and he, therefore, as soon as they were collected, desired that the Vizier might be informed that he wished to speak with him.

From the moment of the arrival of Elphenor at Adrianople, Calil Pacha had never enjoyed a quiet hour. Uncertain whether his former treacherous

communications with the Romans were known to Elphenor or not, he had not dared to commit himself with one, the austerity of whose manners gave him little encouragement. Hitherto, the Ambassador had shown no further indications of friendship towards the Vizier, than the formal courtesy their relative situations imposed; but when Calil received a friendly message from Elphenor, praying that he would dispense with state, and come to his residence unattended, the hopes of the greedy Vizier began to rise. What was his delight, when, on entering the apartment of the Ambassador, he beheld the goodly collection of treasures with which the floor was heaped. His eyes rolled rapidly from one side to the other; and such was the avarice of his soul, that, had it been possible, he would willingly have possessed himself by theft of any one of the tempting objects before him. The stern eye of Elphenor seemed to read him to the heart; and affecting an admiration which he was far from feeling for such trifles, he began to descant upon the merits of each article as he raised it from the ground, holding it up to the enraptured gaze of the Vizier, and

extolling the liberality of the Sultan, who had made him lord of all this wealth. The praises of his master were but faintly echoed by the Vizier; but his admiration for the jewels, and rich stuffs before him, was of the most heartfelt description.

“Holy Alláh,” exclaimed he, “but these pearls are worth a kingdom. What fullness—what lustre,” he continued, holding them up to the light, “and this ruby—by the beard of the Sultan, ’tis almost as fine as the one that his Highness wears in his turban of state—its worth is incalculable.”

“Incalculable,” repeated Elphenor; “nay, the value must surely somewhat depend upon the estimation in which it is held by its owner.”

“The Christian dog,” thought Calil secretly, “he knows not a ruby from a lump of lead. Is it possible,” he said aloud, “that in your country you esteem lightly a jewel of such price?”

“There are some things which would please me better,” replied Elphenor, fixing his eyes on the face of Calil Pacha, “which, perhaps, are of little value to you.”

“If aught of mine hath pleased you,” began Calil, cautiously —

“ I speak not of jewels,” interrupted the Greek ;
“ but, first, can you be secret ?” he asked, inclining
his head towards the Vizier, and speaking in a
whisper.

“ Ah ! what mean you ?” said Calil, starting, and
letting fall the precious string of pearls, which
Elphenor instantly picked up.

“ I mean what I said,” replied the Greek,
calmly picking up, and feigning to count the
pearls, in order to give the cupidity of the Vizier
time to recover its usual ascendant. “ They
are magnificent,” he continued, as he placed
them in his vest, without seeming to remark
the look of intense anxiety the movement excited

wondrous knowledge with which men say the Vizier's head is stored," said Elphenor, in a voice from which all sarcasm was with difficulty banished.

"Nay—for my daughter's sake," began Calil, who had been turning the ruby he still held into every possible position during the flattering speech of Elphenor. "By Alláh! not a flaw is to be found in it; yea, it is marvellous; never did my eyes behold a stone so perfect!" he exclaimed, as if totally unable to repress the admiration which filled his soul.

"It is yours," whispered Elphenor, "together with all you behold, if you swear to answer my questions honestly."

"All—did you say all?" asked the Vizier with an air of surprise. "All—why? only look at this cloth of gold; there is sufficient to cover the floor of the Hall of the Hundred Pillars; and these shawls—the finest cashmere wool. Holy Alláh! but each one is fit for the waist of the Sultan. And the green muslin—the Emirs will give any price for that—and—but did you say all? he again asked of Elphenor, as, having turned over

most of the goods which lay upon the ground, he suddenly espied two caskets set with sapphires and emeralds of so much magnificence, that the very doubt of possessing them almost took away his breath.

“Yes! all,” replied the Greek, with difficulty suppressing the contempt which the agitated demeanor of his companion inspired; for Calil, kneeling on one knee in the midst of the heap of glittering objects, actually trembled from head to foot; his round face, as he raised it towards Elphenor, growing every moment more and more crimson, while the intensity with which he fixed

"Words are easily spoken," said Calil with animation, as his eyes gloated over his treasures ; "so they be not treasonable," he added, however, with a look of terror.

"Or that they are not overheard," suggested Elphenor, lowering his voice.

"Nay—we are safe enough here—your Christian soldiers guard this quarter of the palace."

Elphenor smiled at the admission, and continued,—"How long will it be ere Mahomet be fully prepared to march upon Constantinople?"

"Alláh defend us—his Highness has no such intention," stammered Calil ; "we are friends to the Christians, are we not?"

"How long must it be," repeated Elphenor firmly, "before the army can be equipped? and, when equipped, what force can the Sultan muster?"

"How can I tell?" asked the Vizier, trembling from head to foot. "His Highness has not condescended to inform me."

"Forgive me—I am so unskilled in your laws—I may have erred, in thinking the Grand Vizier both knew and would speak the truth. I will not

inquire further; and," continued he, pointing to the floor, "our bargain of course is at an end."

The word bargain instantly revived all the Jewish propensities of Calil, who, casting a wistful look upon his treasures, came close up to the side of Elphenor, and whispered, "If I trust you, my life is in your hands;—what guarantee shall I have that you will not betray me to Mahomet?"

"The simple fact that I have not already done so," replied Elphenor.

"Look upon this;" and he drew from his bosom a scroll, upon which the eye of Calil had no sooner rested, than his face faded to a hue almost cada-

concealed in various harbours along the coast. At a moment's warning, they will collect upon the seas; and, like a swarm of locusts, the Turkish troops will pour down from every side upon the unwary Christians. The Sultan's words are fair; but hate is in his heart. This is the truth—Calil has spoken it. Be warned, and tarry not in a city already doomed; for," continued the Vizier, as he turned his eyes to the floor, "thou art a man of worth."

"Desert my country, my Sovereign!" exclaimed Elphenor, fervently. "Never. Unhappy Constantine! But I thank thee," he hastily added, as he checked the words of sorrow that rose to his lips. "You have fulfilled your promise; now let me perform mine."

So saying, Elphenor was about to direct that the gorgeous presents of the Sultan should be transferred to the palace of the Vizier; but Calil, interrupting him, explained, that, should it ever be surmised that he had received such riches from the Christian Ambassador, his life might be the instant forfeit. Drawing forth his tablets, he gave Elphenor the address of a Jewish merchant, and in a

short time the treasures, for which the Vizier had treacherously sold the secrets of his master, were collected by Elphenor, and dispatched, in his name, to the merchant, who was secretly leagued with the Vizier in all the infamous transactions in which he was constantly engaged. The danger which attended the course of life in which he indulged, did not appear to affect the spirit of Calil whenever his interest was concerned ; and upon this occasion, so exhilarated was he by the enormous profit which he had obtained, in return for his information, that he seemed totally forgetful of that peculiar gravity of demeanour, which, if not natural, the Turks practise as a habit, until it becomes almost inseparable from their words and actions.

Calil, as his mind revelled in the recollection of the splendour of the pearls and rubies which he had made his own, totally forgot that he was a Turk ; and laughed, and rubbed his short fat hands with most unbecoming glee. At length, just as he had bidden adieu to Elphenor, and was about to take his departure, as he said, upon matters of state, but, in reality, to count over his treasures at the house of his friend and confidant, an unusual

sound was heard without the walls of the palace; and an officer hastily informed the Vizier that a female slave from his harem demanded instant admittance. Startled by so unexpected an occurrence, the Vizier had scarcely time to answer, ere the old negress, who was at the head of the female department, was seen pushing her way in at the door, and having disengaged herself from the guards, who would have held her back, she prostrated herself before the Vizier, exclaiming, with the wildest cries,—

“ She is gone! She is gone! Mercy! Mercy!”

“ Who? what?” exclaimed the terrified Vizier.

“ The Lady Chezmé; the rose of the harem; the jewel of the eye of the Vizier. She is lost, lost;” and again she broke forth into frantic cries.

“ Slave! beast! daughter of a dog, cease thy howling, and answer me. What does this mean? Where is my daughter?” roared the enraged Vizier, remembering, for the first time that day, that he had a daughter.

“ Alas! how can I tell?” replied the woman, somewhat subdued by the fury of the Vizier.

“ Last evening, the Lady Chezmé went forth to

place some flowers on the tomb of the Greek slave, Ayba, and she has never returned."

" Fool! you did not suffer her to go alone," cried the Vizier, trembling with rage.

" Nay; she was attended, as usual, by four slaves," replied the negress; " but saying she would be left alone to pray by the grave of Ayba, the slaves retired a few paces, and although they never took their eyes from the spot where they left her, she had disappeared in a moment. Oh, woe is me!"

" They shall be flayed alive," screamed the Vizier; " and every soul in the harem shall receive the bastinado on the soles of their feet every alter-

vered that not only Chezmé had fled, but that she had contrived to carry off all her valuable jewels; thus, at one blow, depriving him of the hope which he entertained, of placing her in the harem of the Sultan, and of property which he valued fully as much as he did the person of his child. His rage knew no bounds. The most active measures were set on foot; but no clue could be found to her retreat; and as any levity of conduct, once discovered in a Turkish woman, renders her comparatively valueless, Calil at last smothered his disappointment in the best manner he could; and affecting utter indifference upon the subject, the surprise of the event soon passed away, and the name of the beautiful Chezmé was apparently forgotten in Adrianople.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was with feelings of unfeigned delight that Calil Pacha watched the departure of the Christian Ambassador and his followers, as they slowly wended their way through the streets of Adrianople; and for many successive days, every moment that he could steal from his duties, and attendance upon the Sultan, was devoted to a conference with Levi, the Jewish merchant, who usually undertook the task of converting into gold the valuable presents which the Vizier received.

On the present occasion, it was more than ever necessary to dispose of the jewels bestowed by Elphenor, so that should any unforeseen accident occur, they might not be recognised as having belonged to the Imperial treasure. This could only be done by sending them to a distance for sale; yet to trust them to others, was a step to which the Vizier was very reluctant to consent. At last

it was arranged that they should be confided to the care of a party of Jewish merchants going to Venice and Genoa for the purposes of trade ; and having taken measures of precaution, which he imagined left no doubt of their security, Calil gave himself up to the delight of having fully succeeded in his schemes. If for a moment the loss of his daughter recurred unpleasantly to his mind, he quickly consoled himself by the reflection that it was his fate ; and adored the wisdom of Alláh, who, at the moment when he had permitted the loss of so much wealth, by the mysterious disappearance of Chezmé, had not failed amply to compensate him for the misfortune, by disposing the heart of Elphenor to bestow upon him treasures of far greater value than those which she had taken. Unbounded was the belief of Calil in the doctrine of predestination ; and in this particular he did not essentially differ from his countrymen, whose infatuation upon this point offers a strange contradiction to the deference with which Mussulmen blindly adhere to the most minute details of their exacting and complicated creed. It is explicitly declared to them, by the words of Mahomet himself, that the doctrine of

predestination is not applicable to temporal affairs, but merely regards a certain portion of the human species, who, being predestined before their birth to eternal happiness or punishment, can by no means control their fate.

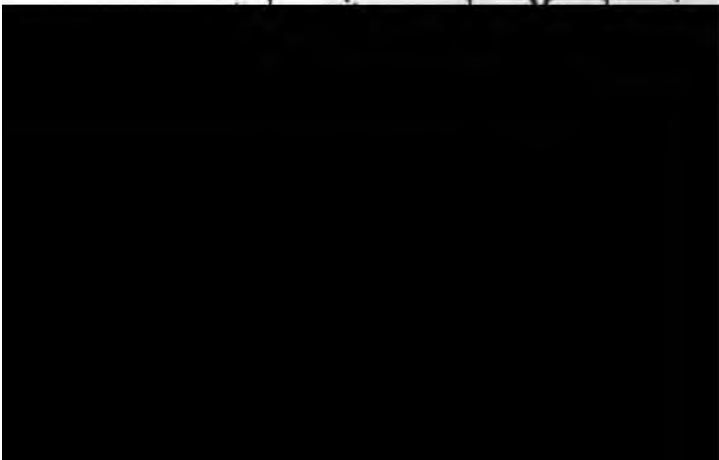
This is distinctly set forth in the articles of their belief; and yet against the express commands of their Prophet, and in open defiance of the most learned expounders of their law, the whole Turkish nation indulges blindly in the dogma of predestination, scarcely admitting the power of freedom of will. Not only are the actions of individuals regulated by this belief, but the whole body, social and political, is so completely under the influence of fatalism

cious doctrine to such a point, that a Mussulman can behold with placid indifference his city reduced to ashes, and a sovereign mark unmoved the ravages of the pestilence which desolates his kingdom, nor take one step towards the prevention of a recurrence of the same disasters, from the conviction that all has been pre-ordained. Strong as is this general delusion, it naturally increases or diminishes in violence, according to the amount of belief in fatalism professed by the reigning Sultan, and those highest in authority under him.

Notwithstanding the superiority of intellect by which Mahomet II. was eminently distinguished, his mind was deeply tinged by superstition, and the doctrine of predestination was perhaps the only point of belief which with any sincerity he professed. Like his namesake the Prophet, who on any emergency always produced a leaf of the Koran, which he pretended to have that moment received from heaven, Mahomet generally contrived so to mould his religious opinions and observances, as to impose upon the credulity of his people, and further his own ends.

If the Sultan had been guilty of insincerity in

the profession of faith in predestination, his Vizier, Calil Pacha, could not be accused of ever having harboured a doubt of the truth of the doctrine. It was a comfortable and convenient creed, well suited to the lax morals of the Vizier. Beneath the shelter of its tenets, he could plunder the poor, and prey upon the rich with impunity; and so fixed was his belief in fate, that he never hesitated in the commission of the greatest crimes, having been assured by an astrologer whom he consulted, that his latter days should be spent in peace and security. This conviction was most consolatory, and always supported the courage of the Vizier in the dangerous situations in which he was too often placed by his own iniquity. Calil Pacha was a



detected in the act of drinking it, should be seized, and melted lead poured down their throats; and such was the determination with which he endeavoured to eradicate the vice of drunkenness from among his people, that one day when he was perambulating the city in disguise, in order to discover whether his commands were fully obeyed, having espied an unfortunate Mussulman upon the bank of the river vainly attempting to conceal his intoxication, the Sultan, indignant at this flagrant infringement of the law, without hesitation, drew the bow he carried, and pierced the offender with an arrow between the shoulders, leaving him to find a watery grave beneath the waves of the Maritza.

Even this example could not terrify the infatuated Vizier, who, consoling himself with the reflection that the unfortunate drunkard must have been predestined to die in this manner, continued his own evil practices in secret. The use of opium had also been forbidden by Mahomet; nevertheless the Vizier always carried a little box in which the interdicted drug was concealed, and frequently contrived to quit the presence of his master for a few moments, even upon state occasions, that he

might swallow a portion of this favourite stimulant. Great difficulty existed as to the indulgence of his passion for wine. As Mahomet had caused the shops to be demolished where it had formerly been sold, it could only be procured by stealth ; and a confidential slave, named Hassan, was employed by the Vizier to convey as much of it as was required for the day, to his palace, where the same slave always served it to the Vizier in cups of brass or silver, in order that its colour might not attract the attention of the other servants in attendance. But this was at the hour of the usual repast. It was only in the evening that Calil could venture to indulge to excess. Then, secure from interruption,

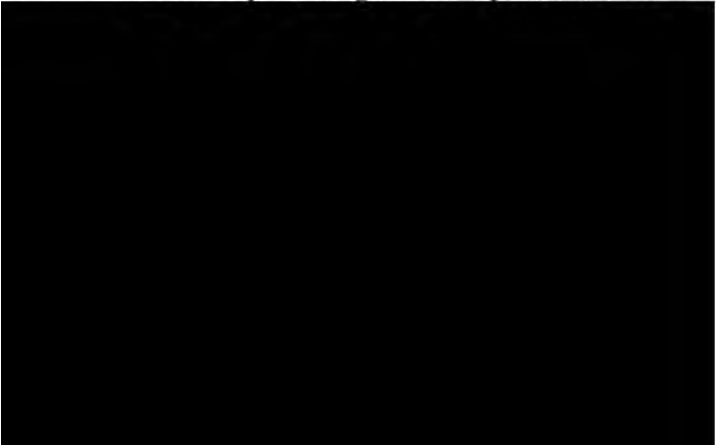
him a detailed account of all that he could not himself remember, at which the Vizier always laughed heartily, while Hassan was rewarded with a piece of gold.

One night, however, the consequences of his habitual indulgence in this vice threatened to be of a more serious nature than usual. Having drank deeply of some delicious Cyprus wine, which Hassan had procured for him, the Vizier had retired to rest, and having fallen into a deep sleep, was suddenly aroused by a violent knocking at his door, which he had secured within to prevent detection. For some time he was only sufficiently awake to be sensible of the noise, without knowing from whence it proceeded. He turned restlessly on his pillow—still the sound continued; while his burning temples throbbed, and every stroke seemed to fall upon his excited brain, until it reeled beneath the agony.

“Pity me—spare me,” he cried, as, still in his sleep, he imagined himself already in the tomb, where the Turks suppose the blue and black angels, Munnker and Nadir, beat the heads of those who die in sin, with red-hot hammers, till the day of judgment. “Pity me—let me rest a moment—my head is on fire. I believed in God—

and that Mahomet was his Prophet. I did not die in sin—Oh ! oh !” he exclaimed, with a shriek, as a louder blow upon the door shook the walls of the room, and reverberated through his brain with so fierce a pang, that at length the Vizier awoke.

“ Where am I ?” he cried, in a helpless tone, at the same time groping about with his hands—but in another moment the voice of Hassan, calling upon him to unfasten the door, reached his bewildered senses. His recollection slowly returned, although it was some time before the dizziness of his head would permit him to reach the door, upon which Hassan still kept up an unmerciful shower of blows. At length the Vizier contrived to open it; and as the light, which Hassan carried in his hand, fell upon the figure which presented itself to



the knee, his sleeves above the elbow, while his shaven head was divested of cap or turban. It was some time before he could understand the words which were addressed to him, and he continued standing in the middle of the room, with his lips apart, his knees bent, and his hands stretched out—a picture of the helpless state of idiotcy to which his degrading passion had reduced him. At length, Hassan, whose vigilance had protected his master from exposure, and who now busied himself in collecting the various articles of his dress, succeeded in explaining to him, that the Sultan desired his immediate presence.

“ Holy Alláh ! ” exclaimed the unfortunate Vizier ; “ how unlucky that his Highness should want me ! Woe is me ! doubtless his wrath is kindled—what have I done ? ”

“ So please you,” suggested Hassan, “ it may be an affair of state. There is no danger —— ”

“ Danger—oh ! yes, there is always danger at unusual hours,” said Calil with a groan ! “ What have I done ? But I have done nothing—nothing—” he repeated, with the stupid stare of drunkenness ; and then, as if to satisfy himself of his safety, he began to recapitulate the twelve deadly sins which,

CHAPTER XV.

IT needed all the deep abstraction of mind, under which Elphenor laboured, to prevent his perceiving the change which had taken place in the manner of his young favourite, Demetrius of

Ypsara. No one would have recognised the gay youth, who had entered the city of Adrianople in a spirit of buoyancy almost beyond control, as they

Hassan, carefully depositing the piece of gold in his vest; "one sin out of twelve is not much. Alláh is merciful! And besides, has not the Prophet declared that all—even the twelve deadly sins—shall be forgiven to a true believer?"

"True—true, good Hassan! worthy Hassan!" replied the Vizier, quickly; "the Prophet has said so. Faith will wash out sin—and I have faith. I believe there is no God but God, and Mahomet is his Prophet! Thanks, good Hassan! Yes, I have faith."

Satisfied with this profession, which the absurdity of the Mahomedan creed declares to be all that is necessary to secure salvation, when pronounced even at the eleventh hour, by the greatest criminal, the Vizier proceeded to finish his toilet. He put on his robe of state, lined with fur; and filling a goblet of gold with coins sufficient to make the customary offering, he hastily swallowed some iced sherbet, which the attentive Hassan had provided; and having regained somewhat of his accustomed composure, proceeded to attend upon his sovereign.

CHAPTER XV.

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disdained farther inquiry, no one sought to penetrate; and the death of a slave was, in that country, an incident of too trivial a nature to excite attention. Thus the manner in which poor Ayba had died, remained a secret from Demetrius, and he was spared the additional horror of believing that it was through his means that she had been induced to commit self-destruction. While ignorant of the manner of her death, the heart of Demetrius could not disavow the belief that her love for him had been the cause of much sorrow to Ayba; and deeply touched by the untimely fate of one so gentle and unhappy, he almost forgot his own grief, and the anxiety with which the disappearance of Chezmé had filled him. From the moment he had parted from her in the gardens of the harem, he had never again beheld the form he so ardently sought. In vain had he lingered in the streets and bazaars, which had formerly served them with pretexts for meeting; the voice he would have recognised even in a whisper, never again met his ear. Worn out by anxiety and love, he would sometimes abandon all hope of meeting in the city, and taking a caique, linger for hours

upon the river, in the hope that she whom he sought might revisit the spot where they had parted ; nothing was visible but the steep wall, surmounted by the balustrade of marble, from which he had thrown himself upon the bosom of the waters, and the gilded roof of the kiosk peeping out from its shelter of flowers, backed by the tall cypress trees, which seemed to stand like its guards around it.

The startling intelligence of the flight of Chezmé appeared, in some measure, to account for the silence and solitude to which he had been thus suddenly condemned. The news burst upon his ear like a clap of thunder. So unexpectedly had it come,

remembered her parting words, "Chezmé will one day redeem her ring!"

There is comfort in hope, however distant ; and the sigh of Demetrius was less sad as he dwelt upon this promise, though, as the cavalcade wound slowly on, and he turned to take a last look at the city ere it was shut out from his view by the rising ground, tears rushed to his eyes, for the white walls and tall cypress and cedar of the cemetery gleamed for a moment in the noon-day sun, and he thought of the poor Greek girl, who, deceived by his idle protestations of love, had so often watched for his approach beneath the same trees which now shadowed her tomb. Dark and terrible was this thought ; for Demetrius was young, and not yet become hardened in vice, or in that worldly stoicism which deadens remorse, and steels the heart against sympathy.

His attention, however, was suddenly withdrawn from his reflections by the voice of Elphenor, who, having for some time complained of indisposition, was now evidently in such an alarming state of illness, that it became impossible for him to proceed. It was the second day of their journey ;

and from his anxiety to reach Constantinople as speedily as possible, Elphenor, soon after they had quitted Adrianople, left the main body of his attendants, desiring them to follow slowly, and with Demetrius, and a few followers, had ridden forward, apparently with more speed than prudence. The violent heat of the sun had materially increased the fever under which he had, in secret, suffered for many days, and which had been occasioned by the deep anxiety which circumstances had obliged him to repress, and the harassing delay of his return, which, at such a time, he felt to be of importance to the cause of his sovereign. Struggling against the weakness which

proceed, for some distance, beneath the rays of a burning sun, at the imminent danger of the life of Elphenor, until, having reached the brow of a high hill, Demetrius beheld with delight the white walls of a large building at no great distance. With renewed hopes they hastened forward—a narrow path through a deep and sandy soil led to the door of what appeared to be a prison; but Demetrius observing the strange attitude of a man sitting upon a stone, with his eyes closed and one arm fastened with a thong of leather far above his head, perceived, by the long hair and pallid hue of his face, that they had arrived at a convent of Dervishes.

“Can we obtain admittance within the convent, for one who is in danger of death?” inquired Demetrius, as, springing from his horse, he uncovered his head, and approached reverently, in the hope of conciliating the extraordinary being whom he addressed. Startled by the sound of a voice so near him, the Dervish opened his eyes for an instant, but closed them again with a shudder, as they rested on the unhallowed form of Demetrius, clothed in the bright and handsome dress which was the fashion of the day.

“ Holy father,” said Demetrius, “ will you not assist us ?”

“ *Lá ilhahi il Alláh*—There is no God but God,” exclaimed the Dervish, without seeming to hear the question addressed to him.

“ For pity’s sake, admit us,” entreated Demetrius.

“ *Yá Alláh*—oh God !—*Yá cahhar*—oh ! avenging God,” again exclaimed the Dervish, with a prolonged shudder at committing the involuntary sin of listening to the words of a Christian.

“ Will you not speak to me ?” cried Demetrius in despair ; for as he spoke in the Turkish language he was aware that he was understood, and that nothing

for sin and avoid temptation, and making a sign to the attendants to remain where they were—as, having lifted Elphenor from his horse, they stood with their mantles extended, to screen him from the sun as he lay upon the ground, Demetrius boldly entered the convent.

It was a square enclosure surrounded by a sort of low portico, or covered walk. Demetrius started back with horror at the first sight which met his view. A man, apparently in the last stage of consumption, was suspended by his long hair to a beam attached to the roof of the portico; his feet scarcely touched the ground, and his arms were strapped tightly behind him. For a moment Demetrius believed that he was dead, but on approaching he perceived, by the large drops of perspiration, mingled with the blood that oozed from the roots of his hair from the violence of the tension, that the unfortunate man was indeed living. He appeared scarcely to have reached the prime of life, but so wan and emaciated was his face, that it was quite transparent; and the lips, drawn down at the corners with an expression of patient agony, were blue and livid, and barely concealed the teeth beneath them, every

one of which was marked out with horrible distinctness upon the faded skin.

It seemed like mockery to address one in such a state; and, moving on, Demetrius came to another man who, sitting upon the ground with his head between his knees, did not appear in such a state of exhaustion. But vain was all attempt at conversation; and had it not been for the words "*Yá Alláh—oh God!—Yá hou—He who alone is God,*" which were repeated on all sides as those wretched fanatics who had committed the involuntary sin of listening to, or looking at, any thing contrary to their vow, endeavoured to make their peace with Heaven, Demetrius would have imagined himself

heard. If an involuntary sob burst from some breast unable to endure its load of torture, it was quickly followed by the exclamations of "*Yá Alláh! Yá hou! Yá hákk!*" uttered in a tone of the most abject supplication.

Filled with horror at the idea, that so many human beings could be found, even in the small space of one convent, who imagined such acts of barbarity could be acceptable to a God of mercy, Demetrius, without further attempt at eliciting permission from any of those present, passed on to the interior of the building, in the hope of meeting with some of its inmates unshackled by the immediate performance of any act of penance. In this, for some time, he was disappointed; he only seemed to have passed from one lunatic asylum to another: for in all the cells which were open he espied the performance of some act of austerity; while, in a large room into which he walked without ceremony, many men, whose grizzled locks betokened an age which should have brought wisdom, were hopping on one leg round the room; some sitting on their knees, swaying their bodies to and fro; others were running up and down, incessantly repeating the

well-known words, "*Lá ilhahi il Alláh!*—There is no God but God!" and a few were dancing in a sort of measured step, as they lowly chaunted the same words in a monotonous tone.

At last, as in despair Demetrius was about to depart, a rosy and well-fed face caught his eye; and though crowned with the high cap of the Dervishes, Demetrius fancied that a countenance so at variance with the spirit of the tribe betokened a heart capable of human sensations.

"For the love of God!" exclaimed Demetrius, hastily pushing open the door, from behind which the Dervish had been stealthily gazing upon the

start with surprise. Unwilling, however, to show that he had discovered anything which the supposed Dervish might wish to conceal, Demetrius briefly explained his business, and received the comforting assurance that the wants of Elphenor and his suite should be attended to.

Without further delay, the Dervish accompanied Demetrius to the gate, where the sick man lay; and having caused him to be lifted up in the arms of two inferior servants, whom he had summoned to assist him, he was about to enter the court by which Demetrius had gained access to the interior of the convent.

“Is there no other way?” involuntarily exclaimed Demetrius, as he shuddered on remembering the horrible objects which must meet the eye of Elphenor. “The sick are fanciful, and cannot bear strange sights as we can,” he added, in an apologetic tone, fearing to offend the prejudices of his new acquaintance.

The Dervish merely turned upon him a quiet smile, and, motioning to his attendants, led the way round to another entrance. Demetrius soon had the happiness of seeing Elphenor placed in a

cool and secluded cell, and a bed prepared for him, which, if homely, was at least preferable to remaining longer in the open air, exposed to the heat of the sun. The Dervish, who appeared to act as the physician of the establishment, now felt the pulse of the sick man, and gravely ejaculating, “*Yá Alláh !*” and “*Yá hou !*” a sufficient number of times, even while a slight expression of contempt might have been detected lurking beneath the assumed air of veneration with which he pronounced the words, he administered to his patient a cooling draught, to allay the thirst from which he suffered ; and, leaving Demetrius to watch by

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL that night Demetrius watched by the couch of Elphenor, and by the dim light of the solitary lamp which had been placed outside the unclosed door of the wretched cell, he could see the dusky forms of the Dervishes as they flitted along the passage in their long black dresses, while the hum of subdued voices, repeating their words of prayer, continued incessant. Nothing could exceed the apparent misery and discomfort of these self-afflicted devotees; and Demetrius, as he looked upon them, could scarcely believe that infatuation could lead human beings into so false an estimate of happiness or duty. As the day dawned, he hoped that, the penance of the night being concluded, a reprieve might be granted to themselves, by the fanatics by whom he was surrounded; but he was mistaken. These credulous enthusiasts, always in a state bordering on insanity, had no sooner com-

pleted one penance than they began another ; and the sound of tears and sobs were intermingled with howls and yells, and exclamations of “ *Yá Alláh !*” and “*Yá hou !*” in every gradation of tone that it was possible to conceive.

Fortunately, the continued noise did not reach the ear of Elphenor ; for the specifics which had been administered to him, had had the effect of producing a lethargic sleep, from which it did not seem easy to arouse him. Satisfied with the look of confidence with which the Dervish who had prescribed for him, pronounced the disorder to be favourably proceeding, Demetrius resigned his place to an attendant ; and following his new

far and wide, and have some knowledge of medicine ; but in ordinary times I am a cook."

" A cook !" replied Demetrius, with a smile ; " I should not have thought that the austerities of your order permitted much indulgence in the pleasures of the table ?"

" You are right enough there," replied the Dervish. " The monastery belongs to the order of the Rufayis, the strictest of all the orders of Dervishes ; and even those who are not bound by a vow of abstinence, have never more than two dishes on their table, and those of the plainest sort."

" Then, of what use are the number of cooks I see there employed ?" asked Demetrius, pointing to an inner room, where several persons were apparently occupied in culinary affairs.

" They are novices, studying for admission," replied the Dervish ; " for though it may appear strange to you, it is the rule that every one who aspires to belong to our order, should serve in the lowest offices of the kitchen, for a thousand and one days. I myself have passed through such a noviciate, and have reached the dignity of *Aschdjy*

Baschy, or chief of the kitchen, and have the privilege of recommending to the Scheik such as are candidates for admission."

"But surely," said Demetrius, "you do not practise all the austerities of the order?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the Dervish, smiling; "you forget that penance is voluntary. It may suit some people's taste, but it does not happen to suit mine."

"Then how is it that you seem to have so much power here?" asked Demetrius, "for I have always heard that those who inflicted most torture on themselves, were esteemed the highest among the Dervishes."

"Hush!" said the man, putting his finger on his lips as he approached Demetrius; "there are secrets in all houses. The Scheik is my friend. He is held as infallible; and in the privacy of his cell, a good supper is sometimes acceptable—you understand."

"Perfectly," replied Demetrius, with a smile. "Still I cannot comprehend why you should have chosen a situation where so many painful objects must be constantly before your eyes?"

“ One must live,” answered the happy-looking Dervish, with a shrug of his shoulders. “ I have travelled over half the world. I have been a barber, a baker, a lawyer, a doctor, a soldier, and a tailor ; but, believe me, not one of these professions is equal to that of religion. Only persuade people that you know better how to take care of their souls than they do themselves, and all that they possess is your’s.”

“ And pray, how do you manage to make it a profitable business ?” asked Demetrius, much amused at the frankness of the man.

“ Oh, very easily,” replied he. “ Though begging is forbidden, yet receiving alms is allowable to our order ; and as every one is obliged to give into the public treasury all that he collects, it amounts, in the course of the year, to a very considerable sum.”

“ Too considerable, I suppose, for the wants of the community,” observed Demetrius laughing.

“ Exactly so,” replied the Dervish with a mock attempt at gravity ; “ and as my office combines that of treasurer, it is my duty to see that any surplus there may be, should be well applied.”

“ I am no longer surprised,” said Demetrius, “ at your choice of a profession. I conclude you will not be in a hurry to abandon it.”

“ Not as long as credulity and hypocrisy make it as valuable as it is now,” replied the Dervish.

“ I know not why,” he continued, fixing his eyes on the face of his guest, “ I have trusted you so readily with my secrets—but something in your countenance bespeaks honesty—you will not betray me.”

“ Never,” said Demetrius warmly. “ The ties of gratitude forbid it, as well as those of honour.”

“ I believe you,” replied the Dervish. “ And

recess close to the door, from which he could easily perceive all that took place in the room within.

“ Is it not permitted to strangers to witness the mysteries of your sect ?” asked Demetrius, seeing that the Dervish hesitated.

“ They are not forbidden,” replied the latter. “ That is, on consideration of bestowing alms upon the community. But ——”

“ I understand,” said Demetrius, showing a purse well-lined with gold. “ Let me see the mysteries of which I have heard so much, and this shall be your’s—but why must we conceal ourselves ?”

“ You may, perhaps,” see things that will startle you,” replied the Dervish ; “ and it is better that you should remain concealed, as any exclamation would be deemed an offence. And, now I will leave you, for I must fulfil my part in the ceremony.”

In a few minutes the room began to fill. An old man, who was evidently the Scheik, or chief of the convent, was conducted with much respect by several Dervishes, and placed in the angle of the

sofa, the place of honour amongst the Mussulmen. The candidate for admission then entered, accompanied by the *Aschdjy Baschy*, or chief of the kitchen, who, placing one hand upon the forehead, and the other upon the nape of the neck of the novice as he knelt before the Scheik, held his cap above his head, while he repeated the Persian distich ordained by the founder of the order :—
“ It is true happiness, and real grandeur, to close the heart against human passions. It is the victory given to the faithful, by the grace of our holy Prophet.”

These words were followed by a hymn; after which, the neophyte received his cap: and retiring

sembly vociferated the words "Alláh!" and "Hou," until Demetrius was nearly deafened by the noise.

This concluded the ceremony; the new Dervish kissed the hand of the Scheik, and was, in his turn, embraced by all his brethren, who then dispersed; and the chief cook, gliding to the side of Demetrius, informed him that the holy exercises were about to begin.

The Scheik, placing himself in a niche at one side of the room, Demetrius first observed that it contained a small altar, beneath which was a brazier full of live coals; and around, upon the wall, were ranged a variety of knives, daggers, and swords, suspended by the handles. As many of the Dervishes as chose to take part in the exercises having seated themselves on the floor in a circle, the Scheik began by reciting the seven mysterious sentences of their creed, which commenced by the exclamations which Demetrius had already heard of "*Lá ilhahi—il Alláh—yá Alláh—yá hou,*" &c. &c., to which the assembly answered in chorus, ejaculating, in a tone so unearthly, the words "Alláh," and "Hou," that the dismal sounds fell with a chill on the heart of Demetrius.

Suddenly the circle appeared transformed into maniacs ; they rose from the ground, and dashing off their caps and robes, twined their arms together, pressing close to each other's sides, and began a movement first from right to left, then backwards and forwards, executed with such precision, that they seemed to form but one body. Every instant the velocity of the movement, and the loudness of the tone in which they exclaimed "*Yá Alláh,*" and "*Yá hou,*" increased, and continued so violent that at last some of their number fell exhausted upon the floor. Each time that this occurred the Scheik clapped his hands, and en-

recited some words, and invoked the protection of Ahmed Rufayi, the founder of the order ; after which he returned them to those who pressed forward most eagerly.

Then began the dreadful scene, upon which Demetrius had no sooner cast his eyes, than a cry of horror, which he was unable to suppress, burst from his lips.

“ As you value your life, be silent,” whispered the Dervish, as he placed his hand upon the mouth of Demetrius. “ In this state, even a Dervish would not be safe from their fury, did they imagine his zeal was inferior to their own.”

With a groan Demetrius turned again, to observe the excitement of the wretched fanatics, who, in the doctrine of their religious ecstasy, were inflicting the most fearful tortures on themselves. Some of those who had received the heated irons, applied them to their foreheads, cheeks, lips, or arms ; while others held them in their mouths until cool. Those who had not been fortunate enough to obtain them, seized upon the daggers that were left unheated, and plunged them into different parts of their body, leaving them sticking in the wounds, as

they ran round the room, ejaculating the name of Alláh ! Not a groan nor complaint was heard ! with unflinching courage they continued their barbarous self-mutilation ; and if any did sink under the infliction, he was hastily laid upon the sofa which surrounded the apartment, while the rest continued their fiendish rites, screaming, singing, dancing—all wound up to a pitch of insanity, that made them more resemble an assembly of demons than human creatures.

“ I can bear no more,” said Demetrius in a voice of anguish, as he drew the arm of the Dervish towards him.

Just then, one of the unhappy wretches ap-

Even the Dervish, who stood by Demetrius, shuddered as he looked upon the wan countenance of him who lay at his feet; and turning to his companion, who, sick with horror, was standing motionless by his side, whispered to him to follow him; and gliding unperceived through the half-open door, they withdrew from the dreadful scene, though for some time they could hear the frantic cries and exclamations of the fanatics, and louder still, the voice of the old Scheik, as he encouraged them, by words and gestures, whenever their strength appeared to fail.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Demetrius, "is it possible that an old man should like to look upon such a sight? and yet yon aged Scheik seems absolutely to enjoy it?"

"He does, indeed, enjoy it," replied the Dervish; "every person who joins the sect pays a tribute to the public treasury. As only a certain number can be admitted at a time, each Dervish that falls a sacrifice to his notions of religion, leaves a vacancy for which there are many candidates. Now you understand why the Scheik is so anxious to encourage an exercise, from which many will never

recover; and even if they should withstand the torture, you know I am a physician as well as a cook—a quieting draught is easily administered.”

“ You do not murder them?” cried Demetrius, starting in horror from the side of his companion.

“ I only obey my superior, when he judges it fitting to put a stop to their pain; that is not murder, you know,” replied the Dervish, with an expression of carelessness that made Demetrius shudder, as he reflected on the state of Elphenor, whose life had been entrusted to this man.

“ For the love of God, tell me,” he said in a

"My honour!" began Demetrius, as he produced his purse ——

"Is but a Christian boast," interrupted the Dervish, with a coolness that sent the hot blood to the cheek of Demetrius, "empty and vain. We Mussulmen have a surer guide—a reliance upon which tells me you will not betray me, while it might convince you that I could have no wish to injure you."

"And what is that?" asked Demetrius.

"*Self interest*," replied the Dervish, taking the purse; and as he turned away, a smile of contempt played upon his lips, at his frank avowal of the lesson which his commerce with mankind had taught him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE is no moment in the life of a Grand Vizier so awful as that in which he receives, at an unusual hour, a summons to the presence of his sovereign. The reason for such a summons may vary, from the most urgent state business to a trifling detail of parade which may have just occurred to the fancy of the despot; or, it may regard the life or death of some person hitherto high in favour, while it has not unfrequently been the forerunner of the disgrace of the Viziers themselves.

Calil Pacha well knew, that if the first words from the mouth of Mahomet were to contain the sentence of his punishment and death, he would still be summoned to hear his doom in the royal presence, and be received with the same form as was customary. It did not, therefore, at all diminish his uneasiness, as he approached the

chamber of Mahomet, to perceive that almost all the usual attendants were in their places; and he even fancied there was an air of mystery in every countenance on which he looked. The two hideous dwarfs, who sat upon the lowest of the gilded steps which led to the apartment of the monarch, could scarcely repress a grin, and the Vizier shuddered, as he caught the bright black eye of one of the mutes who guarded the door, and fancied he read in it a history of the bowstring, and other deeds of darkness, in which these speechless guardians of the tyrant were not unfrequently employed.

Summoning all his courage, he at last entered the presence of his sovereign. Having made three prostrations, he was about to embrace the feet of his master, when he was agreeably surprised by Mahomet covering them with the end of his robe, and extending to him the palm of his hand to kiss. This was a distinction seldom accorded to any but the mufti; and the unexpected condescension of the Sultan caused such a reaction in the feelings of the Vizier that he well nigh burst into tears. By a great effort, he contrived to offer

the present which he had brought; and though Mahomet had never before departed from the singular and degrading custom by which the Sultan condescends to receive presents from all the courtiers who approach him, yet at this moment he seemed to have laid aside his usual habits.

“ I do not wish to receive any gifts,” he said kindly; “ I would much rather bestow some in return for good services. See, I had ordered these to be prepared;” and he pointed to a robe, lined with rich sables, and a magnificent sword, which lay upon a stool of silver at his feet. “ I ask only, in return, a distinct answer to my question.”

“ Your Majesty has only to ask—your faithful slave Calil will answer to the best of his ability.”

“ How long will it be ere my troops are ready to march upon Constantinople?”

Struck by the extraordinary coincidence of this having been the very question, for the answer to which Elphenor had paid so high a price, Calil again began to tremble, as he replied :

“ The moment that my lord commands, his slaves are ready.”

“ It is well,” replied the Sultan; “ Constan—

tinople must be mine. It is my only thought—my only wish. I pant—I burn to possess it. Look at that bed,” he continued, as he pointed to the bed upon which the splendid coverings of crimson satin, worked with pearls, lay twisted and confused among the cushions and pillows.

“ Look at that bed ; all the night I have turned upon it, but without finding rest. Thus shall I be, until I have the Christian city in my possession.”

“ Assuredly, the same God who has given a part will not deny to your Highness the remainder of the Roman empire,” said Calil humbly.

“ We have men, and we have arms—but the Romans have gold,” said the Sultan, who was now perfectly aware of the treachery of his Vizier, and only waited for fitting time and proof to bring him to punishment.

“ Your Highness may have sufficient to purchase more than one empire,” said Calil, evasively, “ if he call upon his faithful people. Myself, with the rest of his slaves, are ready to sacrifice our lives, as well as our fortunes.”

“ Think you, if the people are called upon,

they will contribute much without the tax being enforced?" inquired the Sultan, pretending to accept the assurance of his minister.

"Are not thy slaves true believers, and is not every Mussulman bound by his religion to march against the infidels?"

"A good thought, by the Prophet," exclaimed the Sultan. "We will call it a religious war, and the whole body of the people will rise—Dervishes, Muezzins, Imams, and all, will march to the taking of Constantinople, for taken it must be! But say, has that Christian slave fulfilled his task? Is the great cannon ready?"

"It was finished this day," replied the Vizier, enchanted to find the conversation taking a new turn. "Yea, it is monstrous. I beheld the bullets weighed which are to be fired from it, and the weight of each was six hundred pounds. Thirty waggons, linked together, will scarcely hold it, and a team of sixty oxen will be required to draw it; so says the slave who made it."

"He shall have six hundred oxen, if he require it, so that it be safely planted before the walls of Constantinople. He said its force would batter

down walls thicker than those of Babylon. Let him look to it; if his words are not fulfilled, he shall himself be shot from its mouth."

"He will be in no hurry to rejoin his brethren," said Calil, anxious to appear unfriendly to the Christians; "the beggarly slaves almost starved him while he was in their service."

"By Alláh! they will have their just reward when his cannon thunders at their gates," cried Mahomet in delight. "But first, I myself will see it tried. Proclaim the day, lest any of the faithful should suffer, and I will go in state to see the trial, and from thence to the Mosque to offer up prayers for its success in this our holy undertaking. It is the cause of God and the Prophet! Let the people be warned, and all contributions carefully collected—we shall need much gold."

"My Lord shall be obeyed," said Calil. "But would it not be well," he added, hesitatingly, "if gold be really wanting, to make some small concession to the people's tastes?"

"Concession!" exclaimed the Sultan, haughtily.

"May the Sultan of the universe pardon his slave," replied Calil, meekly bending his forehead

to the ground. "I presume not to advise; but since the Mufti decided that the use of the newly-discovered berry, called coffee, was unlawful, the people have been discontented."

"The slaves! do they dare to murmur?—give them the bastinado till they submit," said Mahomet.

"Assuredly, your Highness is right: yet, on the eve of a war, such a trifle as the drinking of coffee were scarce worthy a thought. Those who had built kiosks when it was drank are ruined, if the decree of the Mufti is adhered to; the rest of the *Ulemah*, however, differ from their chief, and say, as the grain is not *consumed* by the fire, but

“ I do command, and from this hour it shall be law.”

So saying, the Sultan waved his hand, which was a signal that the audience was over; and Calil, making the customary obeisances, retreated from the royal presence; not forgetting, however, to carry with him the splendid presents he had received from his master.

The Vizier was in the highest spirits. Not only had he escaped all danger, but he had also contrived to carry a point which was of the greatest importance to him, the permission of the Sultan for the general use of coffee in his dominions. It had only been lately discovered and introduced by two Arab Dervishes into Constantinople. The enthusiasm of the nation had risen to a pitch, only equalled in after-days by the discovery of tobacco; and yet such was the prejudice of the Turkish government against any innovation, that the Mufti had instantly denounced, as places of abomination, the kiosks, or houses, where the people assembled to drink of the new drug, which declaration had occasioned much discontent in the city.

To Calil it had been a severe mortification, for unprepared for such an event, he had speculated

largely upon its success. Most of the kiosks had been secretly built through his means, and he had by his agents imported an immense quantity of coffee, which was bought at first with avidity, and which, even in those days, was made and drank exactly as is still the practice among the Turks. The Vizier retired to his apartment in the highest delight ; yet, little did he imagine that the wily monarch, whom he appeared to control, had long since been filled with distrust towards him, and merely appeared to seek his advice, in order not to allow any minor affair to interfere with the execution of his grand design upon Constantinople.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MANY days elapsed before Elphenor was able to rise from the bed of sickness to which the deep anxiety of his mind had consigned him. Faithful to his word, the Dervish, who had undertaken his cure, attended him with unremitting care; and Demetrius, as he observed the solicitude which manifested itself involuntarily in the manner of the chief cook, whenever any change for the worse appeared to have taken place in his patient, felt almost ashamed to have ever harboured a doubt of the sincerity of his intentions.

Demetrius, however, in the first flush of generous youth, judged every body by himself. The practised eye of the cunning Dervish had at a glance detected that his visitors were of no ordinary rank: rudeness or neglect could not benefit him; while

from their gratitude, a rich harvest might be reaped. The expressions of anxiety to resume their journey that constantly escaped the lips of both Elphenor and Demetrius, redoubled the hopes of gain which had filled the bosom of the Dervish; and when, some days previous to that which he had named as the first upon which Elphenor would be able to mount his horse, he announced to his anxious guests, that no impediment to their departure now existed, the substantial proofs of the gratitude on which he had calculated, left him no reason to regret the path he had pursued.

It was with feelings of undisguised delight that the travellers once again resumed their journey. The horrors which Demetrius had witnessed within the walls of the Rufayis had left such an impression of loathing upon his mind, that he could not look upon the downcast eye and pallid face of a Dervish without a shudder; and long after the white walls of this den of hypocrisy and fanaticism were hidden from his view, the eternal exclamations of "*Yá Alláh !*" and "*Yá hou !*" by which the terrible silence of the tedious nights, during which he had watched by the couch of Elphenor, had been con-

stantly broken, seemed to ring again in his ear, and revive the hideous recollection of all that he had witnessed.

The first care of Demetrius, on their arrival at the convent, had been to send forward some of the attendants with an account of their situation, which was to be laid before the Emperor; but as they were still above eighty miles from Constantinople, and in a country where travelling was an operation of time and difficulty, it was not until they had entered upon the last day's journey that they were met by an officer, accompanied by the physician of Constantine, and an efficient guard, which had been sent by his orders for the succour and protection of Elphenor. Touched by the kindness which his sovereign manifested towards his person, Elphenor repressed the desire to hear some tidings of his wife and child, until he had questioned the officer as to the state of public opinion, with respect to the result of his mission to the Sultan. Having secretly dispatched to Constantine his own impression of the intentions of Mahomet, what was the dismay of Elphenor, when he learned that the whole city of Constantinople was one scene of joy and festivity. The result of

the conference between the Ambassador of the Emperor, and the Sultan, which had been declared to the public, had been announced in the most glowing and satisfactory terms; and Constantine, eager to allay all apprehensions, in the mind of the people, and also to indulge his own unbounded love for show, extravagance, and amusement, had immediately given orders that the public games, which were celebrated at the expense of the crown, should take place in the Hippodrome.

The enormous expense of these games rendered their celebration always a matter of doubtful policy; but, at this moment, with an almost exhausted

and excess, little fitted to nerve the hearts of the inhabitants against approaching danger.

It was late in the evening when the Ambassador crossed the Hippodrome; yet enough remained to show the extravagance and profusion which had reigned there during the celebration of the games. The three brazen serpents still dripped with the wine which had copiously flowed from their open mouths; and many a group passed, whose flower-crowned heads and noisy mirth proved them to have indulged freely in its use. Elphenor looked sadly upon them, as with joyous songs they escorted some victor in the games with due honour to his home. The lively Greek, and more sedate Roman, seemed equally imbued with a spirit of hilarity, which nothing could check; and the loud laugh and careless jest resounded on all sides, too soon, alas! to be exchanged for the voice of mourning and lamentation.

Sick at heart, Elphenor hurried on until he reached the Imperial palace, and having entered it, instantly sent to demand an audience of the Emperor. The answer he received was an invitation

to attend the banquet which was prepared, and *he* saw that any attempt at interference with the festivities of the hour would be utterly useless. Nor was he more successful, when, having explained the weighty reasons by which he was actuated, he implored the Emperor to countermand the intended spectacle for the next day.

Constantine, relieved by the insincere assurances of Mahomet, from fear of immediate danger, abandoned himself to a thoughtless gaiety; and though his manner and expressions were of the most affectionate nature towards Elphenor, yet with the tenacity of a child he refused to give up his plans for the amusement of the following day, and treated lightly the important disclosures which were made to him by his Ambassador. All his former levity of character seemed to have returned to him with double force during the absence of Elphenor; while the implicit faith which he placed in the protestations of the Sultan, was torture to the mind of one who knew the false spirit in which they had been made. But all remonstrance at that moment was vain, and excusing himself, on the plea

of his recent illness, Elphenor declined accompanying the Emperor to the mimic war, resolving to devote the hours of the absence of the Court, to a visit to his wife and child, for whose presence his heart had so long languished.

CHAPTER XIX.

GORGEOUS was the scene which the morning presented. All that Constantinople could boast of in wealth, beauty, or station, had assembled to do honour to the imperial invitation. The gilt and splendidly ornamented galley, which contained the Emperor and his immediate attendants, was the first that glided from the port, followed by numerous others, vying with each other in the magnificence of their decorations.

Seated beneath an awning of pale green silk, the curtains of which were looped up with a fringe of gold, the handsome countenance of the young Emperor beamed with delight, as he beheld the universal joy that reigned around, and heard the glad shout of the multitudes who lined the shore, and who, frantic with pleasure at witnessing so gaudy a spectacle, rent the air with acclamations, and blessings upon their Prince.

The brilliant fleet moved slowly on towards the channel of the Bosphorus, where those vessels which were to enact the chief part in the day's amusement, had already anchored to await the arrival of the Emperor. The ships that were to attack, had preserved their usual appearance and colours; while those on the opposite side had been made to resemble as closely as possible the vessels of the Mussulmen, so as to render the proceedings intelligible to the uninitiated part of the spectators. Soon the animated shouts of the seamen and the boom of the guns announced that the mimic war had begun; and as Elphenor rode slowly along the banks of the strait, he could see, as the soft breezes wafted the smoke above, the sparkling of the gilded oars, and hear the bursts of music that swelled upon the air, as the infatuated Prince of a giddy and pleasure-loving people swept across the waves in search of new delight; like the summer fly, disporting itself in the noontide gleam, heedless of the cloud that is gathering above.

With a sigh, Elphenor turned from the view, fixing his eyes fondly on the spot which contained

the one being to whom he had never looked in vain for consolation in the hour of anguish or of sorrow. Already he beheld the tops of the tall trees which crowned the hill above his dwelling ; and hastening his pace as much as the weakness of his state would permit, he was soon in view of the bay which bounded the gardens of the villa. What was his surprise, when, instead of the calm tranquillity which generally reigned in that lovely spot, he perceived several persons hurrying to and fro upon the shore, and at a short distance were three large ships, which seemed to be riding at anchor in the bay ; whilst from the mast-head the

lofty cedars, the growth of ages, lay prostrate upon the road, their giant arms stretching in every direction. With some difficulty Elphenor contrived to make a circuit through the wood which surrounded him; but, upon emerging from beneath its shelter, a sight, rousing him to madness, burst upon him. On every side, the noblest of the trees, which in his solitude he had loved to contemplate, were felled to the earth. The pine and the oak, the cedar and the cypress, all lay prostrate together upon the soft sward, which here and there showed a portion of its enamelled breast, gleaming through the yet unwithered boughs which pressed it.

Hastening forward, the scene of devastation every instant grew more fearful to the eye of Elphenor. Statues thrown from their pedestals, and marbles torn from the terraces, were trampled in confusion among the beds of bright flowers, which the pressure of many feet seemed to have almost trodden into the earth; while at every unbroken patch of verdure, several of the small rugged Turkish horses, with the high peaked saddles common to their country, were tethered to the beautiful magnolias and arbutus trees, which had escaped the general destruction.

The fears of Elphenor grew too great for endurance. Quitting the more circuitous path, he spurred his horse up the steep bank which led to the house; and throwing himself to the ground as he reached the portico, he would have entered, but the moment that he appeared, a score of turbaned heads protruded from the entrance, and the flashing of scimitars warned him not to approach.

“What means this?—who are ye?” exclaimed he, speaking, in his agitation, in his own language. A deep silence followed; and each Moslem figure which now filled the open space, might have been deemed one of stone, but for the fierce flashing of their dark eyes from beneath their sullen brows.

where is my wife?—my child?—where are my servants?—speak, I command you.”

Somewhat awed by the imperious gestures of Elphenor, and the mention of the Sultan, the soldiers looked at each other; yet no answer was returned.

“Where is my wife?” again exclaimed Elphenor, in a tone of agony.

Still no answering voice met his ear; but he fancied that he perceived the looks of the soldiers directed more particularly towards one of their number, and that a shade of apprehension passed over the countenance of the man. Without appearing to have observed it, Elphenor, with astonishing calmness, drew forth a well filled purse, and turning, as if to depart, observed, “It is the duty of a soldier to obey—doubtless, you have been commanded to be silent. I will seek your chief, and ask for justice at his hands. Let him but restore my wife and child, he shall have gold as much as he can desire.”

So saying, he left the spot, but not without having seen the same glance rapidly directed towards the soldier he had at first remarked, and

who seemed of a grade superior to his comrades. Distracted with apprehension, Elphenor hurried on he knew not whither, when, as he turned the brow of the hill, his fears assumed a still darker shade. The promontory on which he stood was literally covered by Mussulmen, not only soldiers, but artisans of every class appeared to have collected on the spot. The air resounded with blows of the axe, and already a considerable angle of the beautiful wood was levelled with the ground; while others of the workmen were busily employed in tearing up the terraces, and hewing the most beautiful marbles into small pieces, some of which were already half consumed in the fires which had

and offering to assist him, he said, "You will want better forage for these than can be found here—they seem starving."

"They have had little enough since they left Gallipoli," returned the boy, sulkily; "but they have had better fare than I have."

"That is unjust," said Elphenor, as he put a piece of gold into the hand of the youth. "But for what purpose are all these men here?"

"They are going to build a castle for the Sultan. They only came last night, and see all they have cut down already!"

"Who is your chief?" asked Elphenor, who felt as if his senses were deserting him.

"Zeïd, the silversmith," as if every one did not know Zeïd in Gallipoli. "He was a silversmith before he turned soldier. No chance of any gold from him; he knows the value of it too well," said the boy, in a voice like the growl of a young mastiff.

"And where is Zeïd?" inquired Elphenor, struggling to repress his anxiety.

"Gone to see the show the Christians are making down there on the water," replied the boy, pointing

towards the straits; “but he is coming back now I see, and those lazy fellows asleep there will feel the bastinado, I dare say, if he catches them ——” and with a scowl of delight at the probable fate of his companions, the young Mussulman set himself to work to collect the scattered fragments of wood and pile them up in heaps.

Elphenor did not see what had suddenly caused the boy to quit the spot where he had been standing. The eyes of the wretched husband were fixed upon the vessel which, he felt, contained the only person who would or could relieve his mind from the dreadful surmises with which it was oppressed.

Hastening to the shore, he received the Mussulman

the praiseworthy habit of the Turks, who not only do not try to conceal but openly proclaim the profession they have followed, was a tall thin man with a sharp face, and the eye of an eagle. He received the salutation of Elphenor graciously, placing his hand upon his breast, and, upon learning his name and situation, immediately produced a firman from the Sultan, authorising him to take possession of the spot which he then occupied, in virtue of the treaty which had been signed by the Ambassador of the Emperor at Adrianople. His instructions further *commanded* that no bodily harm should be done to the inhabitants, unless they resisted, nor any money extorted from them.

This specious show of generosity served to mark out the treachery of Mahomet, in the advantage he had taken of the very unwise permission of Constantine to select a spot upon his territory whereon to build a kiosk, or summer house, where he might enjoy the beauty of the scenery.

Elphenor did not now pause to debate the justice of the case, but with frantic entreaties besought the Ottoman chief to restore his wife and child, offering at the same time any price he should name

as their ransom. The eyes of Zeïd glistened as Elphenor spoke of gold, but fortunately they rested for a moment on the written document he held in his hand, and to disobey it openly, he well knew would cost him his head. Not having time to devise any scheme whereby he might secure the tempting bribe of the Greek, Zeïd took the simple method of telling the truth, which was, that Ida with her child and servants were safe within the walls of the villa, and that on pain of severe punishment he had forbidden his soldiers to molest or hold communication with any of the Greeks until his return.

As Elphenor listened to these words, his joy and

eyes on hearing of her safety. Zeïd could have met or have parted with any, or all, of his four wives, without exhibiting the slightest emotion.

Acceding to the entreaty of Elphenor, the Ottoman chief, not unmoved by curiosity, accompanied the Greek towards the house, assuring him, all the time, that he need not fear for his wife or servants, for that his soldiers were completely under his control.

"Though I was a silversmith," he exclaimed, as he strutted along the terrace in his flowing robes, "every one is aware of the talents of Zeïd for war. His Highness the Sultan well knows I am to be trusted, and that none dare disobey my commands. Some day you will see Zeïd a Pacha, with three tails planted before his tent, and nine led horses in front when he marches to battle." So saying, and swelling with importance as his mind revelled in visions of the honours of the Pacha, which are the secret hope of all Mussulmen soldiers, Zeïd entered the house, his soldiers all drawing back, bending their heads, and laying their hands on their breasts. What was his dismay, and the agony of Elphenor, when, having traversed all the

apartment neither Idris, nor the child, nor even one of the servants could be discovered. Furious at the exposure of such a breach of his boasted discipline, especially to Elphénar, Zeïd rushed to the portico, and seizing the first soldier that he met, dealt him such a blow on the head that the man roared with pain.

“Where are the Christian women?” shouted Zeïd, as he shook the unfortunate soldier by the throat. “How is it that my orders are disobeyed? Did I not command that the house should be guarded, and no one allowed to enter or pass out before my return?”

“It was not my fault,” stammered the man.

“Peace, slave! where are the women?” cried Zeïd, rendered more angry by the consciousness of his own error, in having left his post.

“Produce them, or I will have your nose and ears cut off for disobedience.”

“Pity—spare me!” cried the man, sinking on his knees, “I did not take the gold.”

“Gold—what gold?” asked Zeïd, still more frantic at the idea that some one had fared better than himself.

All eyes were now turned to the man whom Elphenor had before observed as conspicuous among the soldiers, and who, perceiving that he had no chance of escape, fell on his knees before his chief, and confessed, that for a sum of gold which he now laid before Zeïd, he had permitted the departure of the Christian women.

"Slave! dog! beast! how did you dare to disobey my orders? Take that—and that—" as he struck him with all his might with the handle of his sword across the face; "and here," calling to some soldiers who were retiring gradually towards the outside of the portico, "Tie up this dog of a slave, and give him the bastinado, till the soles of his feet are laid bare."

Shocked at this cruel order, Elphenor attempted to interfere, and so far succeeded in pacifying the wrath of Zeïd, that he promised, on condition of his future good conduct, and the sacrifice of all the money he had received, to forgive the offence of the soldier.

Satisfied with this assurance, Elphenor hastily took his leave; but before he had reached the top of the hill, his heart sickened at the shrieks which

met his ear, showing the value a Mussulman smarting with wounded vanity attaches to a promise. Elphenor would willingly have returned to try and rescue a fellow-creature from torment, especially as his heart bled for the sufferings of one, by whose disobedience he himself had so deeply benefited; but his knowledge of the duplicity of the nation forbade him to hope that Zeïd the silversmith might offer an exception, and he, therefore, was compelled to abandon the unhappy wretch to his fate. Elphenor had not proceeded far, when he was met by some of his own servants, who informed him that his wife had taken refuge at the house of a neighbour. Thither, he im-

CHAPTER XX.

THE indignation of Constantine was unbounded upon receiving the intelligence which, on his return to the city, was immediately announced to him. The treacherous advantage which had been taken of his generosity deeply wounded the sensitive and noble heart of the Emperor; and almost with tears in his eyes, he acknowledged to Elphenor the truth of the predictions he had hitherto refused to believe.

The example of his Grand Chamberlain was in itself sufficient to have excited a spirit of emulation in a mind less self-sacrificing than that of Constantine. The total destruction of his property, and the demolition of a dwelling rendered dear to him by so many associations, appeared less to affect the thoughts of Elphenor, than did the cruel baseness with which Mahomet had selected the spot, of which, during his visit to Adrianople,

Elphenor had been led, by the wily questions of the monarch, frequently to boast.

The unflinching integrity of the Greek Ambassador, while it excited the surprise, had also engendered a deadly hatred in the bosom of Mahomet, who secretly winced beneath the galling contrast an upright and honest policy presented to his own crooked and perfidious ways. The malice of his heart was gratified by the injury which it was in his power to inflict upon one who had scorned his bribes with undisguised contempt, and he had instantly devised the scheme which now called forth the surprise and indignation of Constantine and all his people.

But soon Elphenor was not the only sufferer. Every hour brought a fresh account of the devastation which the followers of Zeïd, the silversmith, were causing in the neighbourhood of the spot upon which they had landed; and before the next day a thousand masons, each with two attendants, disembarked from the Mussulmen ships which now crowded the straits.

To each of these masons was assigned the task of completing two cubits per day; and by the

immense quantities of materials which hourly arrived, it was plain, not only that the building was to be of large dimensions, but that it had been planned for a considerable time before-hand. Boats from Cataphrygia came loaded with lime; others from Heraclea and Nicomedia brought timber, ready seasoned; and large blocks of stone, which had been dug, and hewn into form in the quarries of Anatolia, were conveyed, with infinite toil, up the steep ascent of the shore. Europe and Asia seemed to have combined to produce, at a moment's warning, the necessary materials, as well as the artisans requisite to carry on the projected works.

The only answer which Zeïd would or could return to the inquiries of the Emperor, was a justification of himself, by pleading obedience to the Sultan, who had ordered him to erect, upon the European shore, a fortress similar to that by which the Asiatic side was defended. The policy of Mahomet was at once visible. By the erection of this castle he would secure to himself the Black Sea, and cut off from that side all communication with Constantinople. In a few hours, between four and five thousand persons had collected upon the promontory.

To have seized their ships, and put the people to the sword, would have been the work of a day to Constantine, and might have operated as an effectual check to the audacity of Mahomet. By gaining time, the Greek empire might yet have acquired strength; but Constantine, whose sense of honour, under the circumstances, was, perhaps, scarcely justifiable, forbade the sacrifice of so many lives in a time of nominal peace, and resolved once more to try the effect of remonstrance.

A message to the Sultan was resolved upon, but no longer one of conciliation or friendship. The spirit of Constantine was roused, and with his own hand he wrote a letter to Mahomet, complaining

with the spirit of enthusiasm with which the breast of Demetrius glowed towards his sovereign.

In this hope, however, he was disappointed ; and even when he stood before her father, the Grand Vizier, he did not venture to pronounce the name that trembled upon his lips.

The answer of the Sultan was such as realized the worst fears of Demetrius. Having carefully read the letter, he turned upon the young Greek a countenance beaming with anger.

“ Tell your master,” he said, “ that he will soon learn that Asia is inhabited by the Turks, and Europe is deserted by the Romans. The empire of Constantinople is bounded by her walls—the ground I have taken is my own, and mine it shall remain. The castle I have ordered to be built is the fulfilment of a vow, made by my father ; and it shall be fulfilled. That castle shall rear its head aloft long after the stones of the Greek city, like the power of its Emperor, have crumbled into dust before the arms of Mahomet. You have heard my words—they shall be accomplished.”

“ Hear, then, the answer which His Majesty the Emperor of the Greeks has commanded me to

deliver," said Demetrius, boldly. "Since neither faith, nor submission, nor friendship have weight with one who regards them not, let him pursue his impious course. My trust is in God! To the last drop of my blood I will defend my city and my people! Let Him who is judge of all decide between us."

"Tis well," exclaimed Mahomet, rising in anger, though really not ill pleased at these hostile words. "Return to your Emperor, and tell him the fate that he covets, soon shall be his.—Ere he can look around him, I will be at his gates. He knows not the Sultan of the Ottomans, if he thinks he resembles his predecessors. Tell him that I will do in a day more than they would have thought of in years. Return this once in safety; but should another messenger arrive, to attempt to appease my fury, he shall be flayed alive."

With these words Mahomet broke up the audience; and Demetrius once more departed from Adrianople, without having been able to learn anything of the fate of Chezmé. He had endeavoured to make some inquiries, but was everywhere met by the stupid indifference which the

Turks commonly manifest upon any subject not immediately concerning themselves. Full of sorrow for the probable danger to which her abandonment of her home must have exposed her, *Demetrius* returned, sad and weary, to Constantinople.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE mask was now thrown aside, and the answer of the Sultan left no doubt as to the course which Constantine ought to pursue. Messengers were immediately dispatched to all the allied powers, craving their immediate assistance. The Pope, alarmed at the turn the affairs of the empire had taken, condescended to accede to the oft-repeated prayer of Constantine; and the Cardinal Isidore of Russia, with a superb retinue of priests and soldiers, soon afterwards arrived in Constantinople.

The very means which had been devised to secure the protection of the Holy See, militated against the general good of the empire. The arrival of the Cardinal was the signal for the revival of religious prejudices; but the Emperor, true to his promise, and supported by the opinion of Elphenor and the ablest of his councillors, immediately announced his intention of carrying into effect the union of the

churches. That every one might understand the minute points of difference between the forms of worship, sermons were publicly preached in various parts of the city, and priests went about expounding to the people the necessary information. Many conformed at once to the rites of the Azymites, as the Roman priests were called; but the great mass of the citizens listened in sullen silence, unable to confute the arguments they heard, though inwardly chafing against this innovation upon their religion.

As time pressed, however, at last the decree of the Emperor went forth; the 12th of December, 1452, was fixed for the signing of the Act of Union, as it had been ratified in the Council of Florence; and in the church of St. Sophia, the two nations were summoned to join in the communion of sacrifice and prayer.

On the morning of the appointed day, the city presented one mass of human beings; some hurrying to the church, with hearts full of zeal and devotion; others, stimulated by curiosity, though the greatest portion of the Greeks who attended, were actuated by a dislike of acknowledging the superiority of the Latin church, rather than by a feeling of

repugnance to its form of worship. The spirit of discontent was at its height. The Greeks, as they entered the church, kept close together; and, as the service proceeded, they studiously avoided acceding to what had been commanded, namely, that all should openly join in prayer. The ostensible excuse was, their ignorance of the language in which the service was conducted, while in reality they burned with envy on beholding the splendours of the high mass, which was celebrated by the Cardinal himself, attended by his retinue, dressed in their richest habits. The names of Nicholas V., and Gregory, the exiled Patriarch of the Greeks, resounded together in a solemn chaunt from the altar; but even this failed to arouse any warmth of feeling in the congregation, and, murmuring and quarrelling, even the conforming Greeks departed from the church.

“Holy Virgin!” exclaimed one, who appeared peculiarly out of humour, “there will be no living in the city for us now.”

“These Romans were proud enough before,” said another, who was a tailor; “but I warrant me, now they have got their grand Legate, with all

his bedizened followers, they will hold their heads a little higher. I dare say not one of them will condescend to wear one of my mantles now; all their embroidery must come from Rome, I suppose."

"Well, any day I can show them better brocade than their grand priests swept up the aisle in to-day," said a little man, who was a silk weaver. "Ah! they'll be obliged to come to us, after all."

"It is not exactly the gain I mean," replied the tailor. "Thank heaven, I am above that; but to think of the audacity of those accursed Azymites, daring to dispense with adding warm water to the wine for the Holy Sacrament."

"All that I would pass over, in charity to their ignorance," said another; but, Holy Mother of God! to think that our infant children are to be debarred from receiving the sacrament, is a heavy sin."

"What do the Azymites care if *our* children perish body and soul?" answered his neighbour. "There will be the more room for the proud Romans; but, at least, they need not call this new-fangled tyranny religion."

"It is scandalous," observed a demure-looking

personage, who had been listening for some time to the murmurs of the crowd, and was an itinerant preacher. "I have done my best to expose the fallacy of the Azymite creed. I have studied by night, and toiled by day; but, ye deluded men, ye would not hear me."

"Hear you!" exclaimed a young man, with a merry face, who stood by. "Why, we should have enough to do, if we listened to all you say. I'm for Saint Gennadius, who never talks for more than five minutes at a time."

"Gennadius! Gennadius!" immediately echoed several voices. "Let us go to the holy man; he will soon tell us what we are to do, and whether this grand Legate and his Romans are to trample us and our religion under foot."

"Yes; to Gennadius, let us go," shouted the multitude; and in a body they rushed to the cell of the monk; but he, foreseeing, probably, what would happen, had taken the wise precaution of securing his door inside. As none presumed to intrude upon the privacy of the anchorite, the foremost of the crowd, which was chiefly composed of artisans, stood aghast at the discovery.

“ Here is a tablet,” cried the preacher, seizing with avidity a written piece of parchment, which hung outside.

“ Read it then,” exclaimed the young man who appeared to hold the oratorical powers of the preacher in great contempt ; “ at all events, it will be better than one of your sermons.”

So saying, he took off his cap with an air of respect, and his example being followed by the whole multitude, the preacher roared out, with stentorian lungs—“ Oh miserable and degraded Greeks ! why will ye abandon the religion of your fathers, and trust in the Italians ? The sword of the Infidel is above your heads ! Faith alone will save you. Pause, and repent. For me, may the Lord have mercy on me ! I am innocent of the crime.”

A deep silence followed the reading of these words, which at last broke into a low murmur, and then swelling gradually, as the people gained courage from the looks and whispers of their neighbours, it burst in one wild shout of triumph and defiance.

“ We were right ; we were right, after all. Away with the Azymites, holy Gennadius for us ! ” exclaimed a loud voice from among the crowd, while

the rest took up the cry, and the name of "Genadius" rent the air.

"How say you, my friends?" asked a fat little man, a wine-seller, as soon as silence was in some degree restored. "Shall we drink a cup in honour of the Holy Virgin, and confusion to the Azymites?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted the multitude. "Away with the cardinal. Away with the Azymites—we want no new religion here;" and, singing and shouting, they threw up their caps in the air, and turned to celebrate their triumph, towards the quarter of the city where the wine-seller lived.

This was the commencement of the schism, which spread like an epidemic through the town. The fumes of intoxication aided the frenzy of the zealots; and the Greek priests, through the medium of the confessional, continued to fan the flame. All who had received the communion, or even listened to the prayers of a Romish priest, were condemned to a rigorous penance. The church of St. Sophia was denounced as polluted, and avoided by the benighted fanatics with as much religious horror, as a Jewish synagogue, or Heathen temple, and the name of Azymite became the foulest of stigmas.

This religious mania was fatal to the cause of

the Greeks. Dastardly by nature, their meanness found an excuse in their devotion, to dispense with their duty to their country ; and to separate themselves from an Emperor who had dared to execute so impious a plan, appeared to their excited minds a praiseworthy determination. Preachers went about inflaming the zeal of the lukewarm, by promising a supernatural deliverance, and exciting a blind spirit of resignation, till scarcely a Greek of the middle or lower classes remained untinged by the contagion.

In such a state of things was the first appeal made by the Emperor to his people. All those capable of bearing arms were invited to assemble in the open space of the Hippodrome, and to enrol their names in defence of their country. A day was appointed for the ceremony ; and Constantine, in whom the treachery of the Sultan had aroused the spirit of a hero, rode forth, surrounded by a brilliant train of officers and courtiers, and addressed the multitude.

“ Citizens and friends,” said he ; “ you have heard how the Infidel Turk has dared to insult you. He has sworn to level your city with the

dust, and to sell your children for slaves. Will ye bend your necks to the yoke? Shall the tread of the Moslem pollute the hearth of the Christian? Citizens! your sovereign calls upon you to arise; not only for his honour, but for your liberty and your lives! Arise! and be firm; be faithful, and Mahomet shall rue the day when he dared to boast that the Crescent should gleam where the Roman Eagle had died."

These words were received with a burst of acclamation. The volatile multitude, always easily excited by any display of spirit, and delighted with the show and splendour by which their Emperor was distinguished, forgot for the time their religious differences; and, as he rode round the vast arena, graciously acknowledging the cheers and blessings which, especially by the women, were lavished upon him, he indulged in the delusion that he possessed the affections of a devoted and enthusiastic people. It generally happens that those whose demonstrations of attachment are the most noisy, are also the most backward in offering their service in any time of danger; and ere long the buoyant spirit of the young Emperor was

chilled by the discovery that the number of those who volunteered in his defence was comparatively trifling.

Elphenor, whose observing eye had noted the symptoms of disaffection, even in the midst of the shouting crowd, had wisely suppressed the publication of a fact that would have at once carried despair to the hearts of the faithful adherents of the Emperor.

The Greeks almost unanimously refrained from entering their names upon the lists. The population of the city was estimated at above a hundred thousand inhabitants; and yet, to the consternation of the Emperor, he was secretly informed by Elphenor that four thousand nine hundred and seventy Romans were the only really efficient soldiers within the walls. The report was scarcely credible, but the fact was indisputable; and tears of shame and mortification burst from the eyes of the young monarch at this proof of the spiritless and cowardly nature of the subjects whom he had loved and trusted. Deserted at home, it became more than ever necessary to secure the intervention of foreign aid; and princely offers and promises

were made to the bands of mercenary troops by which Europe was then overrun, and who were always ready to sell their services to the highest bidder. Yet this accession would be comparatively trifling, considering the overwhelming numbers of the enemy; and the situation of the city of Constantinople became every hour more precarious.

All that could be devised by the activity and energy of Elphenor and a trusty band of adherents, was willingly executed by Constantine, who devoted himself, day and night, to the duties which devolved upon him, of the importance of which he seemed aware, alas! only when it was too late! He caused the fortifications of the city to be repaired and strengthened; and every ship which arrived for the purposes of trade, was detained to augment his means of defence. The naval force of the Mussulmen was inferior to that of the Christians, though in numbers far surpassing it; and Constantine felt hope revive in his bosom as he beheld the beautiful waters of the Golden Horn, crowded with his ships, and defended by a strong chain, which, drawn across the mouth of the harbour, seemed to bid defiance to any attempt of the enemy.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FEW weeks had elapsed, and the alarm which the preparations of the Emperor had excited began to subside, when the startling intelligence was received that the Sultan had quitted Adrianople, and was advancing, at the head of his army, towards the city. The vanguard had already taken possession of several small towns and villages on the Black Sea, belonging to the Greeks; and the fall of Selybria, which alone had dared to resist the summons of the Moslem, and was in consequence speedily reduced to ashes, spread terror and desolation around. The panic was increased by the unbridled licence with which the news of the advance of the Sultan inspired the followers of Zeïd, the silversmith, who hitherto had restrained them within bounds.

The fortress was now completed; and of the beautiful villa of Elphenor not a vestige remained,

except a few of the largest trees, which, being sufficiently removed from the shore not to offer any impediment to the progress of their work, the Mussulmen, yielding to their national reverence for such objects, had contrived to rescue from the general wreck. Of the buildings, terraces, and statues, not a trace was left; and some marble being required to complete the interior of the castle, the Turks without scruple had seized upon the neighbouring churches and convents, and torn down the pillars of porphyry, consecrated to St. Michael the archangel, which were held in peculiar veneration by the Greeks.

This roused the anger of the latter, who, falling upon the Mussulmen, endeavoured to wrest from them the prize they had seized: but the attempt was vain; the Christians were defeated; and those who escaped the slaughter took refuge within the walls of Constantinople, carrying with them the most exaggerated account of their defeat. The city was in an uproar, and some of the most discontented publicly accused their Emperor of tamely submitting to see his subjects butchered by the Turks.

Constantine, who knew that his only chance of safety lay in the perfect unity of spirit of those who surrounded him, instantly came to a determination, which he hoped would be the means of separating the disaffected from those who remained true to him. He issued an ordinance that for three days the gates of the city should remain open, and that all who chose to depart were at liberty to do so. From a neighbouring tower Elphenor anxiously watched the effect of this proclamation, and beheld with grief and indignation a base crowd, amongst whom were many of the principal Greeks, bending their coward steps beyond the reach of danger. Sadly he gazed upon these degenerate sons of a noble race; and turning to Ida, who was standing by his side, exclaimed, as he beheld the scorn which flashed from her eye as she marked the caitiff crowd hurrying from the gate, "Unhappy country!"

"Unhappy indeed," replied Ida, "when a woman's cheek must blush to call it her's. A land of cowards and of slaves! See, see how they rush forward, as though the Moslem cannon were planted on our walls. Shame, shame upon them all!"

“ And yet,” said Elphenor sadly, “ could I but persuade thee, thou, too, shouldst be amongst them. Consider, Ida, my beloved, this is no place for thee !”

“ Yes, yes,” interrupted Ida, “ my place is by thy side. In danger as in joy, it is my place, and none shall tear from me the precious right. Nay, do not speak,” she continued, seeing that Elphenor was about to remonstrate, “ I know there is danger—but to part were death.”

“ There may be a danger still worse than death,” said Elphenor, hesitatingly, as he strained the clasping form of Ida to his breast.

“ None,” replied Ida, in a low voice, as she half withdrew from its sheath a poniard she carried in her vest ; “ none, for her who never forgets she bears the holy name of wife.”

“ My blessed Ida,” exclaimed Elphenor, in a voice of anguish, as his mind trembled before the allusion these words conveyed. “ Be advised, there is yet time ; consider our child—our Melanthe.”

“ I have considered all,” said Ida, hastily ; “ I will not leave you.”

“ Then be it so,” answered Elphenor, solemnly ;

“and thou, O Holy God! watch over and protect her!”

With these words, he laid his hand on the bowed head of his beautiful wife, and both seemed for a time to breathe a secret prayer; but neither prayed for themselves.

On the fourth day, the gates of the city were closed. Every hour now brought fresh causes of alarm; but soon all doubt was dispelled. The Sultan was scarcely five miles distant from the city. The rapidity of his approach was appalling. Consternation filled all hearts, and sentinels were appointed at both sides of the town to give notice of the first appearance of the foe, or the still expected succours which had been promised by the allies. Long did the anxious watchers strain their eyes over the blue waters of the Bosphorus—no friendly vessels greeted their longing gaze; while on the side of the land, symptoms of an approaching army were but too visible; and ere the hour of noon had passed, on the 6th day of the month of April, the crescent of the Infidels glittered on the hills, and Mahomet encamped before the walls of Constantinople.

The land side on the base of the triangle, which the city forms, was the quarter chosen for the attack ; the other two sides being defended, the one by the Golden Horn, and the other by the steep shore of the Propontis, not affording to the Moslem any chance of success.

The city was fortified towards the land by a treble wall of enormous thickness, extending to the length of six miles, and separated from the enemy by a deep ditch a hundred feet in breadth. The wall was defended by numerous towers, built at irregular distances. Towers also flanked the gates, before the principal of which, St. Romanus, Mahomet had planted the standard of the Prophet.

The first attack produced little effect, and after a few days, the Sultan, impatient at the slowness of his progress, resolved to change his plan of operations. He directed the chief part of his force to be concentrated before the gate of St. Romanus, and gave orders that the towers by which it was guarded, should be battered to the ground. The monstrous cannon, which had been dragged with infinite toil from Adrianople, was planted opposite, flanked by two others of scarcely smaller dimen-

sions ; while fourteen batteries opened at once upon every point which appeared accessible. The whole force of the Turkish artillery thundered upon the walls, and the union of the ancient with the modern system of attack, added still more to the horrors of the scene ! Streams of the liquid and unquenchable fire, then so much in use, mingled with stones and darts, rained upon the city ; while from the walls the brave Constantine, with a devoted band of followers, poured down upon his assailants a shower of lances and arrows, accompanied by an incessant discharge of small arms ; their musketry being so contrived as to fire ten bullets at a time, carried no small havoc into the foremost ranks of the Ottomans.

Unmindful of the danger, Constantine, whose heroic courage seemed to gather strength every moment, undertook the defence of the outward wall ; and when the din of battle no longer allowed his voice to be heard, by his gestures he encouraged his soldiers, who seconded him with undaunted spirit. A furious sally was made by the besieged, and so unexpected was the movement, that in an instant hundreds of the assailants lay dead within

the ditch ; and the Christians, under cover of a well directed fire from the walls, retreated without much loss, carrying off a great number of prisoners.

This first success raised the hopes and courage of those within the city, more than it had damped the ardour of the besiegers ; but Mahomet did not view this slight repulse with as much calmness as his generals, and the superior discipline of the Christians stung him to the quick. He immediately ordered the formation of trenches, and endeavoured to institute a more systematic plan of attack than had at first been pursued, thus endeavouring to remedy the terrible confusion and insubordination of his Ottoman troops.

But the training of an army is not the work of a day, and on every side the genius of the Sultan was thwarted by the ignorance, and want of discipline of his followers. Though abundantly supplied with ammunition, it soon became apparent that the Turkish artillery produced little effect. In a paroxysm of fury, Mahomet ordered the engineers to be stoned through the camp, and others to be brought to supply their places ; this, however, was not productive of better success.

The art was yet in its infancy, and the talent of the Sultan could not supply the place of practical knowledge. At length, in despair, he proclaimed that a reward of a hundred ducats should be given to him who would undertake to direct the fire effectually. Many presented themselves, and to the shame of Christianity, Andebert of Saxony, a Christian warrior, who had taken service with the Moslems, was the successful candidate, who scrupled not to use his experience against his brethren.

He immediately assumed the command of the engineers ; and Mahomet, whose mind was far above the prejudices of his nation, beheld with joy the crest-fallen air of his officers, as they sullenly witnessed the superior science of a stranger. Under his able guidance, every shot now told upon the angle of the tower ; and soon the crumbling of the outer wall gave token that the ancient structure began to yield. Elated by his success, Mahomet resolved upon a still nearer approach ; and ordering an immense number of waggons, hogsheads, trunks of trees, and every thing that could be collected, to be placed at the edge of the ditch, at a given signal the whole of the mass

was forced into it, by the united strength of thousands; and such was the barbarity with which the workmen were urged to an effort almost beyond the strength of man, that many were thrown head foremost beneath the rolling weight, and crushed to atoms. The power of numbers triumphed, and before nightfall, a firm footing was obtained where before a yawning abyss alone had been visible.

Satisfied with their day's work, the Ottomans retired to their camp—the firing from the city had ceased, and each party seemed to await the return of day to renew the combat; but Constantine, ever watchful, had not quitted his post upon the walls, and taking advantage of the darkness and storm which had arisen, in the dead of the night he collected all his forces, and sallying forth from each of the gates, before sunrise he had contrived to draw the greater part of the rubbish with which the ditch had been piled, within the walls.

The next morning the whole Ottoman army was stupified with surprise; but Mahomet, whose fury against the Christians rekindled at every repulse,

swore with a fearful oath that the chasm should be refilled before night, or that he would march across the ditch over the bodies of his men.

A despot seldom threatens in vain. By unparalleled efforts, his orders were obeyed, but only to be again counteracted by the resources of the active Emperor; and at length, worn out by the little progress he seemed to make, Mahomet suddenly abandoned his mode of attack, and keeping up a sufficient fire to engage the attention of the besieged, he employed an immense body of troops to undermine the city.

Concealed by the whole force of the Janissaries, who occupied the post nearest the ditch, the miners advanced steadily until within a short distance of the walls, when they found a stratum of rock of such hardness, that it was almost impossible to cut through it. This was an obstacle which their want of skill did not enable them to overcome; and, in fear and trembling, the Vizier repaired to the pavilion of the Sultan, to inform him of the ill success of their endeavours.

Calil Pacha found the tent empty, and Mahomet so deeply engaged in a scheme, that for some time

had engaged his attention, that for the moment the alarm of the Vizier subsided. In the midst of an open space in the camp, the Sultan, on horseback, was himself directing the construction of a machine, such as never before had been used by the Turks. An enormous tower of wood, with a flat top, stood upon rollers of a gigantic size. The outside was covered with a thick coating of hides, in order to protect it from fire. Inside there was a staircase, and various loopholes; the stairs conducted to a platform upon the top, where a machine, worked from within, raised a broad ladder to the same level; thus forming a sort of bridge, which could be thrown across in the course of a few minutes, whenever a favourable opportunity offered to approach the walls of the city. This tower was the invention of Mahomet himself, and nothing could exceed the consternation with which it filled the Greeks as they beheld it gradually lowered by a thousand pullies from the opposite side of the ditch.

With a solemn awe they gazed upon the almost supernatural structure, which advanced inch by inch, creaking and tottering, until it rested exactly opposite the gate of St. Romanus. The walls were

crowded with spectators, and Constantine, with his brilliant staff, occupied his usual post. The heart of the Emperor sickened, as he beheld this new device, which he well knew would increase in his people the apprehension which he had in vain striven to subdue. Suddenly he laid his hand upon the arm of Demetrius, who stood next to him, while, with a gesture, he imposed silence upon all around, and every eye followed the direction of the anxious glance of their sovereign.

From one of the upper loopholes, which had been left in the sides of the machine, in order to admit the light, a small white flag was hastily waved, and as hastily withdrawn. This was repeated several times, and then from above the coping of the platform, upon the top, a turbaned head was seen peering cautiously around, and a face, too well known in Constantinople for the honour of him in whose service it had visited the camp of the enemy, appeared. It was that of Hassan, the Janissary, who had been the confidential servant of Calil Pacha. One moment of steadfast gaze upon the walls, the next a bow was raised, and as the head of Hassan sunk behind the coping, an arrow dropped at the feet of the Emperor.

Demetrius sprung forward, and, picking it up, presented it to Constantine, who hastily untied and examined the letter which was bound around it; then summoning Elphenor to his side, a few moments of consultation took place, before the secret was imparted to Demetrius.

“ This scroll,” said Constantine, addressing him, “ informs us, that within that tower is a friend who would serve us. To rescue him, upon the first attempt of the enemy to scale the walls, will be a service of danger, if not of death ! Demetrius, this honourable post is your’s ;” and the Emperor gave the scroll into the hand of his faithful friend.

One instant the young Greek knelt before his sovereign; in another he had quitted the spot; and, with a trusty band of soldiers, he proceeded, in accordance with the directions contained in the paper, to take his station upon the outer wall, directly in front of the wooden tower. A single shot was heard—then another, and another—and the next moment a sharp firing from the turret announced that the combat had begun. The cheers of the Janissaries on the opposite side of the ditch,—the shouts of “ Alláh ! Alláh !” repeated by thousands of voices—the sharp

report of the matchlocks, and the sullen boom of the guns, as an incessant fire was kept up upon the walls, on either side of the tower, rendered it almost impossible to distinguish any lesser sound.

Demetrius, who with undaunted courage continued to maintain his perilous situation, now feared that something had occurred to mar the execution of the proposed plan, when once again the pullies of the tower began to creak, and the ladder was slowly raised towards the walls. The intense anxiety with which Demetrius watched the progress of the unwieldy machine as at one moment it reared its head, and the next seemed to totter under the weight of the stones which were hurled upon it from the city, caused him to doubt the policy of having entrusted the secret to so few of the besieged. Soon, however, he was relieved from his worst fears. The ladder was firmly planted against the wall, and the first form that bounded across it, was that of Hassan. A score of Jannissaries, stimulated by the hope of the immense reward offered by Mahomet to those who should effect an entrance, rushed upon his steps, and, with deafening shouts of "Alláh! Alláh!" endeavoured to beat

back the first opponents they encountered, in order to afford a free passage to their own supporters.

The soldiers of Demetrius, acting from the orders they had received, allowed Hassan to separate himself from his companions, against whom their well-directed fury told so effectually, that they were completely repulsed; and the ladder having given way under the accumulated weight of those who pressed onwards to support them, they were precipitated into the ditch.

Meanwhile, the escape of Hassan had not been attended with the complete success a device so bold, might have warranted, and struck down by a bolt from a cross-bow, he had fallen within the walls. But his wound, though severe, was not dangerous, and he soon recovered sufficiently to be carried before the Emperor. During his interview, which lasted a considerable time, he disclosed to Constantine the plan which he had laid, and by which the tower, and all that it contained, could be reduced to ashes.

In the bottom of the machine was a magazine filled with powder; and Hassan having contrived, during the night, to secrete himself among the bags

which contained it, had opened the lower part of several, and by boring small holes through the boarding, had secured the means of effecting instant ignition.

“And what motive can you have in thus betraying your sovereign?” inquired Constantine, half doubtful of the sincerity of purpose with which this extraordinary disclosure was made.

“Revenge!” answered Hassan, while his black eyes rolled hideously, and every feature was distorted with rage.

“He has seized upon my daughter—my only child, and shut her up within the walls of his accursed harem. I dared to implore her release—offered gold—gold that would have purchased ten slaves more beautiful than she is; and the only answer I received, was a hundred strokes of the bastinado. Had they been upon my feet, I should have been a cripple for life; but a Janissary may not be beaten, save on the back; I had just been enrolled, so I escaped; but the wounds upon my body are yet unhealed. I bore all in silence, for I had vowed revenge. Open the gate before midnight—promise to protect me afterwards, and

I will lay the train. Five hundred picked men of the Sultan's own body guard, and several of his best officers, are within the tower—*where will they be to-morrow?*"

A shudder ran through the Christians at the savage grin which glared on the countenance of Hassan, as he uttered these words; but pity may not tarry in the breast of a warrior; and Constantine gave the required promise. The tear which had glistened in the eye of the Moslem father, as he spoke of his daughter, showed the depth of the grief which a Turk ever scorns to betray, and the Emperor no longer hesitated to trust him. The words of Hassan were true. That night, ere the midnight watch was set, the work of thousands was destroyed; and the shriek that rent the air, as a terrific explosion lighted up the heavens till the stars paled beneath its glare, told to Mahomet that in the ready treachery of an enslaved people, might ever be found one of the sure and bitter curses of a despot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE check which the Turkish arms received, had the effect of producing a temporary cessation of hostilities. The rage of the Sultan knew no bounds; and it was in fear and trembling that Calil Pacha ventured to lay before him the overtures of the besieged for peace. The confidence of Mahomet had considerably abated, yet his words were more haughty than before; and the three conditions which he proposed as the terms of an honourable surrender were so revolting to the feelings of the Christians, that the negotiations only terminated by a mutual increase of hatred and animosity.

During the momentary repose afforded by the interchange of messages, the Emperor had had several interviews with Hassan, who was recovering from his wound. He had been received into the house of Elphenor, where he was watched and

tended by Ida with zealous care. The terror of the poor slave lest he should fall into the hands of Mahomet, was pitiable to behold ; yet, amidst all his fears, a feeling of gratitude and faith to his old master, Calil Pacha, constantly broke forth ; and in the most touching words he would bewail the unhappy situation of the Vizier, and his probable fate, should the Sultan become aware of any of his mal-practices. Gratitude in a Turkish bosom holds the place of all other virtues ; and Hassan could not forget the master whom he had served. Every day some new device was proposed by him, whereby the Vizier might be warned ; but hostilities had recommenced, and all possibility of friendly communication with the besiegers was consequently prohibited.

At length, Demetrius, whose heart ever sunk at the mention of danger to the father of Chezmé, undertook, with the permission of the Emperor, to endeavour to carry into effect a plan which Hassan solemnly assured him, if successful, would be the means of saving the city. This was, to seek the Vizier, and, through his endeavour, to win over the good offices of Almanzor, the chief astrologer.

The gross superstition of Mahomet was no secret to his followers. In all his enterprises Almanzor accompanied him; and so implicit was the belief of the Sultan in his predictions, that no plan of operations was decided upon without a previous consultation with the astrologer, who, for the greater convenience of his Royal Master, occupied a pavilion immediately behind that of the Sultan. More than once had Hassan been the depository of the secret means by which the Vizier had contrived, when it suited his purpose, to influence the predictions of Almanzor; and he informed the Emperor that it only needed a bribe more enormous than any he had ever received, to render the reading of the stars utterly unpropitious to the designs of the Sultan against the city.

So confident was Hassan of the success of his scheme, that the Emperor at length consented to the prayer of Demetrius, who nobly volunteered to undertake the hazardous experiment of penetrating the Turkish camp. No sooner, however, had every thing been arranged, than a new difficulty presented itself. The royal treasury had been emptied by the

preparations for war ; and the city was reduced to such a degree of poverty, that Constantine had been reluctantly obliged to seize upon the holy vessels belonging to the churches, and coin them into money, in order to satisfy the avarice of the mercenary troops, who refused to fight till the arrears of their pay had been discharged. To the everlasting shame of the Greeks, many there were who secreted their wealth, replying to the entreaties of their sovereign by allegations of poverty ; and when the attempt was about to be abandoned for want of means, it was a Jew who stepped forward to the relief of the Christian Emperor, who, in consideration of the valuable articles advanced, was actually forced to pledge the jewels of his imperial diadem.

At length, all was prepared. For some days the siege had been carried on without vigour, and the hour of sunset had been the signal for the cessation of hostilities. With a beating heart, but a spirit which rose as the hour of danger approached, the young Demetrius impatiently watched the decline of day ; and no sooner had the brief twilight disappeared, than, fully equipped as a Janissary, he

prepared to leave the city. With infinite toil he contrived to cross the ditch, and succeeded in clambering up the rocky ledge on the opposite side, which formed as it were a natural counterscarp. Looking cautiously around, he hastily traversed the space in front of the Turkish outposts, and taking advantage of a slight irregularity of ground, threw himself at full length into the shadow of the mound, in order to take a better survey of the objects around.

The night was dark, though, at intervals, a struggling moonbeam shone for an instant through the heavy clouds that were hurrying across the sky. Demetrius could plainly discern the glimmering of the crescent, which marked the pavilion of the Sultan ; while a little in advance, the dark green folds of the standard of the Prophet flapped heavily as the night wind swept past. To escape the vigilance of the sentries, was a task of no great difficulty. Sheltered by his disguise, which had been taken from a prisoner, Demetrius, assuming the air and gait of a Turk, was allowed to pass on unmolested, until he reached the camp ; but, once arrived within the incredible mass of confusion a Turkish encampment presents to the eye, his

perplexity returned ; and to reach the tent of the Vizier, without discovery, appeared a matter of impossibility. So profound was the silence which reigned around, that each step upon the sandy surface upon which he trod, was distinctly audible, and more than one turbaned Infidel of the numbers, who were lazily stretched on the ground before their tents, opened their eyes, and laid their hands on their scimitars, as the progress of Demetrius somewhat disturbed their repose. Still onwards he proceeded, taking advantage of each gleam of moonlight, in order, if possible, to ascertain the position of the tent of the Vizier, which was always at some little distance from that of the Sultan.

Demetrius appeared to have reached the middle of the camp, but on all sides rose pavilions of so much magnificence, that it was impossible for a stranger to distinguish between them. In the centre stood one tent much larger than the rest, and elevated upon a dais. This Demetrius knew to be the one in which the council met, and in front of which criminals were executed. Fifteen *Spahis* stood with drawn sabres at the entrance, to guard the imperial treasure, which, in little boxes, is always kept in this tent. Not daring to approach

too closely, lest some awkwardness might reveal to the watchful eyes of the *Spahis* that he had dared to use the garments of a Janissary as a disguise, Demetrius wandered on, obtaining through some curtain left unclosed, in order to admit the air, an occasional glimpse of the interior of the tents, the splendour of the hangings and furniture of which far surpassed his imaginings; but amidst the crowd of pavilions belonging to the Pachas, distinguished by the number of tails planted before their door, were mingled those of the Beys, Agas, and Nobles, in such confusion, that he began almost to despair of discovering that of the Vizier without addressing some inquiry to those around.

More than once Demetrius was obliged to retrace his steps, for the path was encumbered to a degree that any one not conversant with the mode of Turkish warfare, would have imagined themselves in a fair rather than the camp of a besieging army. Artisans of every calling had contrived to set up their shops in as much apparent security as though not on a field of battle; and mingled with the tents were sheds for the sale of sherbet and coffee, which, though partially closed, revealed to the

anxious glance of Demetrius hundreds of turbaned Infidels, sitting, cross-legged, upon mats, and as calmly and unmovedly enjoying themselves, as though the possibility did not exist that the morning sun might see the ground on which they sat, reddened by their blood.

One word—one movement inconsistent with the disguise he had assumed—would have betrayed Demetrius to his foe, and it required all the brave spirit within his breast, to refrain from any indication of fear when he discovered that, turn which way he would, a figure constantly glided upon his steps. Unflinching in his purpose, he moved steadily on; but his heart beat almost audibly, as, on passing before the door of a tent, from which issued a stream of light, the figure suddenly stood between him and the opening of the curtains, and he sickened with disgust as a hand was laid upon his arm, and he perceived the tall cap and flowing robe of a Dervish. The remembrance of the scenes he had witnessed in the convent rushed to his mind, and he hastily endeavoured to shake off the unwelcome touch; but in vain: and at length, yielding to an earnestness he

could neither comprehend nor resist, he suffered himself to be led, or rather pushed, into the shade of the tents between which he stood.

“Hush!” said the Dervish, in a whisper so low as to be scarcely audible; “one word, and you are lost.”

Demetrius started, and laid his hand on his sword.

“Follow me, but speak not,” said the Dervish; and Demetrius, again yielding to an undefinable impulse, quietly obeyed.

Not a word was spoken; the dark figure of the Dervish, gliding through the mazes of the camp, was often scarcely discernible; and several times Demetrius felt his hand seized as his conductor hurried him along. What was there in the pressure of that hand, wrapped in the long sleeve of the Dervish habit? More than once the frame of Demetrius seemed to shiver beneath its grasp.

After many turnings and windings his guide stopped before a tent of larger dimensions than most of those they had passed, and having entered it, closed the curtain, and drew from a corner a robe similar to his own. Making a sign to Demetrius to

envelope himself in its folds, at the same time removing the ample turban worn by the Greek, he hastily substituted the high felt cap belonging to the Dervishes, over which he drew the hood of the robe in a manner similar to that in which his own was arranged, totally concealing the face of the wearer. The Greek soldier actually shuddered with horror, as he found himself thus transformed in appearance to one of the sect he so much abhorred; but his knowledge of Turkish customs went far to remove all feeling of alarm; for, aware of the full liberty in which the whole tribe of Dervishes perambulate an Ottoman camp, and the veneration in which they are held, he was convinced that a friend watched over his safety.

“And now,” said the Dervish, as once more they moved forwards, “what would Demetrius of Ypsara in the midst of an enemy’s camp?”

“You know me, then?” incautiously exclaimed Demetrius, almost aloud.

“Hush!” replied the Dervish, in a low whisper.

“I do—and would serve you. Tell me how I may do so—be quick—but”—seeing that Demetrius hesitated—“be honest.”

“Lead me to the Vizier’s tent, and let me see him alone.”

“Alone,” repeated the Dervish, somewhat bitterly; and Demetrius almost gasped for breath as he thought the tone was one that he recognised; but the Dervish again sinking his voice to the same whisper, continued, “Is it on thine own, or thy master’s business thou hast come here?”

“My master’s is my own—although my own may not be my master’s,” replied Demetrius, with a suppressed sigh.

The answer appeared to satisfy the Dervish; and after the pause of a moment, he said calmly, though in the same scarcely audible whisper, “Trust all, or nothing. If I do thy bidding, I must hear thy words, even though the Vizier be not aware of my presence.”

“Be it so, then,” replied Demetrius, whose confidence in his unknown friend had wonderfully increased within a short time.

Not another word was spoken. Soon the numerous guards and attendants they encountered, denoted the neighbourhood of some great personage; and the outer circle of tents being passed,

the crimson and gold hangings of the pavilion of the Vizier were visible from the light of many lamps which were hung around the entrance. Without impediment they gained the inner compartment of the tent ; for such was the respect and superstitious reverence of the Ottomans of all grades for the Dervishes, that it was esteemed a high honour if any one of them condescended to take up his abode within the walls of a Turkish dwelling ; and the prayers of the holy man were entreated by the favoured individual, who in the presence of his guest felt secure of salvation.

The surprise of Calil Pacha on the discovery of the supposed Dervish, was not a little amusing to Demetrius, who, as he gradually unfolded the plan which had been proposed, marked the look of trepidation with which the Vizier regarded the kneeling figure of the Dervish who had accompanied him, and who, with his back turned, was apparently occupied by his devotions.

“ Assuredly, assuredly !” said the Vizier, hurriedly, as Demetrius concluded by a mention of the valuable presents from the Emperor, of which he was the bearer ; “ thy words are full of truth, and

thy Emperor a man of grace and bounty, not to mention the noble Elphenor. But the risk is fearful ——” and Calil looked around, as if in each fold of the rich drapery of his tent lurked a spy of his royal enemy.

“And your friend? good Demetrius,” he added, as his eye lighted upon the figure of the kneeling Dervish. “I must speak with him—is he, too, a Greek?”

“Nay,” exclaimed Demetrius, who saw that for some weighty reason the Dervish carefully concealed his person from the eye of the Vizier, “your Eminence has nothing to fear. The holy man I have long known—he has been deaf from his birth; the thunder of the cannon could not reach his ear, and his tongue is tied by a vow of silence, which your mightiness must well know by a Dervish is never broken.”

The ready wit of Demetrius prevented a disclosure which, much as he himself desired it, might, he readily surmised, place the whole party in jeopardy; and after some further consultation, and promises of reward and favour from the Christian Emperor, Calil took his way to the tent of the

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE moments seemed as hours to the anxious Demetrius, before he was summoned by Calil Pacha to the presence of Almanzor, the chief astrologer to the Sultan. The interval had not passed very quietly, as appeared by the agitation of the Vizier. Either the cupidity of Almanzor was unsatisfied, or his conscience really smote him, when he found himself suddenly called upon at one blow to annihilate the hopes and fortune of his sovereign, by declaring the will of Heaven opposed to further proceedings against the Christians. Certain it was, that the refusal of the astrologer had never been so positive, nor his professions of attachment to Mahomet so profuse as upon this occasion. Slowly, and apparently with the greatest reluctance, did he at length consent; and the Vizier hastened to introduce to the presence of Almanzor the bearer of the promised bribe; for Demetrius, aware of the

abyss of treachery which in a Turkish government yawns on every side, had firmly refused to part with the jewels he bore, except to the person for whom they were destined.

He found Almanzor seated upon a cushion in the centre of the tent, around which the symbols of his art were carefully arranged, his own figure forming a strange contrast to the rest of the apartment; for though this was plain, even to meanness, the astrologer was clothed in a robe of flowered velvet, lined with costly sables, a fur only permitted to the Sultan and the highest of the nobles; while from his neck depended a chain of the most elaborate workmanship, representing the twelve signs of the Zodiac, in jewels of every colour. Rings glittered upon his fingers; and the high cap which he wore was one blaze of light from the magnificence of the gems with which it was adorned. It seemed a matter of difficulty to determine how much would be sufficient to tempt one already so rich; but Demetrius, aware of the immense value of the treasures entrusted to his care, boldly drew them from his vest, and laid them one by one on a low stool by the side of Almanzor. Calm and stately,

the thin face and deep set eye of the reader of the stars gave no token of surprise or admiration. Not so the Vizier. No sooner had the first of the articles produced by Demetrius met the eye of Calil, than an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips.

“Holy Alláh! can it be possible—it is very like—but all pearls bear a close similitude—and those emeralds. Surely the villain has not dared—I will not believe it—tell me, my friend,” said Calil, no longer able to contain himself, as he imagined he recognised the jewels, which were in fact his own, “whence hadst thou these gems?”

“From the Emperor—my master,” began Demetrius, “to whom a wealthy Jew ——”

“Ay, a Jewish merchant! Levi by name! Yes—yes. I see it all,” exclaimed the Vizier, wildly, maddened by the thought that the very jewels of which he had hoped to make base merchandise in a distant land, had returned to bear witness as it were against him.

“Merciful Alláh! I am betrayed—ruined,” he exclaimed almost with a shriek, as the magnificent ruby of a form and size so remarkable, that it

must at once be recognised as that given by the Sultan to Elphenor, was added to the glittering heap now in the possession of the astrologer. "Good Almanzor—worthy friend—oh! suffer me but to return this ruby to the Christian soldier, and all I have shall be thine. Were but his Highness, the Sultan, to hear of it——"

At this moment, a low hissing laugh was heard in the tent, but from what quarter it had proceeded no one seemed to know. The ruby fell from the grasping fingers of Calil Pacha; Demetrius startled from his caution, laid his hand upon the dagger concealed beneath his vest; and even the attendant Dervish quitted his kneeling posture, and stood upright by the side of the young Greek. The astrologer alone appeared unmoved. It was as if the fiends, with whom he was supposed to hold converse, had whispered in his ear a language unknown to his companions; for he slowly raised his wand, and pointing to the curtain of black which veiled the entrance to the tent, motioned to his visitors to withdraw.

Surprised at this termination to their interview, Demetrius remained firm, until finding his hand

cautiously seized, and that his mysterious guide endeavoured to draw him from the spot where he stood, he made one effort more to secure the accomplishment of the scheme for which he had run so many risks. Making a deep obeisance to the astrologer, he said, with as much of respect as he could throw into his voice and manner, "Man of science and of might—thou to whom it is given to read the stars and to know the destiny of nations, tell me by what token I may show to my master that thou art favourable to his wishes?"

"Young man," said Almanzor, slowly; "as my years are many, so are my words few; the Vizier hath my promise—depart in peace!"

The deep voice of the astrologer, and the solemn manner of his address, overawed the feelings of contempt with which Demetrius had entered his presence; for even the minds of the Christians in those days were not untinged by a superstitious belief in the power of such as affected to pry into futurity. The astrologer had risen as he spoke, and raising the ebony wand which he held, again motioned to his visitors to depart.

With a low obeisance, Demetrius withdrew,

though ill satisfied with the success of his mission ; but it was some time before Calil could summon courage to follow him, till seeing that Almanzor would not be further questioned, he also moved towards the door, still keeping his eyes rivetted on the jewels, amongst which the pear-shaped ruby glittered like a star of fire.

No sooner was he alone, than Almanzor, hastily securing the entrance, moved towards the opposite side of the tent, and drawing forth a slight iron rod, the wall of black cloth fell to the ground, and the Sultan stood before him. Bending low on one knee, Almanzor would have kissed the border of the imperial robe ; but Mahomet, unheeding the salutation of his Astrologer, strode into the middle of the tent, and seizing upon the jewels that lay where Demetrius had placed them, exclaimed, in a voice almost inarticulate from fury,

“ For every pearl on this string shall the traitor receive a hundred blows. Slave !—caitiff !—son of a dog ! by the beard of the Holy Prophet, the day that I stand within the walls of Constantinople, the gold of the Christians shall pour molten down the throat that has dared thus to lie to his sove-

reign. Accursed traitor ! every torture that I can devise awaits thee at my first hour of leisure. Till then must I feign ignorance ; and thou, Almanzor, see that the secret is kept, or, deservest thy holy calling, shalt thou taste of my vengeance.

“ May the glory of the universe number Almanzor among his deadliest foes, if the Vizier's name escape his lips until His Highness is avenged !”
obsequiously replied the Astrologer. “ Yet night and day must I implore the pardon of Allah through the intercession of his Holy Prophet for having even pretended to hearken to treachery.”

“ It was well done, and Alláh is merciful,” answered the Sultan in a more moderate tone. “ The Vizier is in favour with the people, and it were well to have some proof of his guilt, though had we none, his death had still been certain. Thou hast played thy part well, Almanzor.”

The Astrologer bent low before his sovereign, well knowing that he alone possessed the power to tame the fiery spirit which, except when worked upon by superstition, recked neither of heaven nor of hell, whenever the gratification of his furious

passions was at stake. Long and deep was the conference which ensued, till Almanzor, who had his own reasons for so doing, at length persuaded the Sultan to postpone the general assault which he meditated for the morrow, until a more propitious conjunction of the planets should authorise the measure.

Though writhing with impatience, it never occurred to Mahomet to doubt the celestial influences ; and he withdrew to his tent, to solace his perturbed spirit by inventing fresh cruelties to be practised towards the Christians who might fall into his hands.

In the meantime a stormy interview had taken place between Demetrius and the Vizier, until, satisfied by the reiterated protestations of Calil, that no doubt whatever existed as to the friendly disposition of the astrologer towards the Christians, and that the Vizier was equally prepared to assist the Emperor, whenever a favourable opportunity should occur, Demetrius took his leave, and, accompanied by his silent and mysterious guide, prepared again to traverse the mazes of the Infidel camp.

The moon now shone in full splendour ; but,

wrapped in their disguise, the two Dervishes passed safely on, without question or remark. Still Demetrius could not help observing that when most distant from danger, the voice of his companion was lower than before, and his answers more brief and hurried. The gratitude which filled the heart of the young Greek, for his almost miraculous preservation, flowed in fervent protestations from his lips; and yet a monosyllable, or inclination of the head, was the only reply to his entreaty, that the name of his preserver might be revealed to him.

“ Tell me, at least, thy name, that I may join it in my prayers with the one that ever rises to my lips,” were the words of Demetrius, as they stood once more on the brink of the ditch which separated them from the walls of the city. The Dervish shook his head, but vouchsafed no reply.

“ Is there nothing that I can do ?” said Demetrius, bitterly, “ to prove my eternal gratitude ?”

“ The ring that is on thy finger,” whispered his companion; “ I would keep that as an earnest of thy faith.”

“ My ring !” exclaimed Demetrius, as he rais

to his lips the ruby which had been the parting gift of Chezmé. "Ask my life; nay, a thousand lives, had I them to give, should be sacrificed, ere that ring quitted my finger."

"A talisman, perhaps?" said the Dervish inquiringly.

"Mine, at least," answered Demetrius, passionately. "My hope,—my life,—my very soul is bound up with this, and none but the hand that gave shall have power to claim it whilst I breathe."

Demetrius, as his mind turned to the hour and the scene when that ring had been placed upon his finger, raised his clasped hands towards heaven, and remained for a few moments as if in prayer. Suddenly he started; a sigh—a soft and stifled sigh, had reached his ear. Was it the low moan of the night wind? or the spirit of his loved Chezmé come to answer to his prayer? Demetrius could not tell - - - He looked around, but no one was near; and even the dim outline of the flowing robes of the Dervish, as he retreated towards the camp of the Infidels, was fast disappearing in the gloom.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE wrath of the baffled Sultan grew more fierce, as the brightest efforts of his genius were foiled by the sturdy vigilance of his foe ; while the position of the besieged became every moment more desperate. To defend themselves within their walls was now their only aim ; for every attempt at a sally had been attended with so much loss, that the garrison was reduced to less than half of its original strength.

The treasury was empty, provisions were failing, and discontent rapidly gaining ground. No effort or self-denial practised by the young Emperor, infused the slightest spirit into the breast of the dastard Greeks. To save themselves, and their property, was their only wish ; and more than once, as the brave and noble Constantine had appeared before his subjects as a suppliant, he had been

greeted with taunts and reproaches for not acceding to the degrading terms upon which alone Mahomet had declared that he would spare the lives of the citizens. The anguish which filled the heart of the Emperor, on beholding the ingratitude and abject spirit of a people he had cherished, was only equalled by the unparalleled energy and devotion he displayed. To this young Prince, born in luxury, and whose natural inclination had been a life of pleasure and of ease, the first touch of adversity had been like that of an enchanter's wand. He had been transformed at once into a hero. Forgetting his habits of indolence and state, every effort was exerted to rescue his people from a fate which, in the sublime elevation of his soul, he hourly and fervently prayed might fall on him alone, as alone deserving the wrath of heaven for the supineness of his former life.

Accompanied by his faithful friends, Elphenor and Demetrius, the Emperor, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, visited every spot where his presence might encourage, or his sympathy console. Daily prayers were offered up in all the churches; but neither the sincerity which the faith-

ful adherents of Constantine manifested on all occasions, nor, what was more extraordinary, the feeling of common danger, could touch the hearts of those whose idol was gold, and to whom bigotry and prejudice supplied the place of religion.

At the hour when the cannon thundered at their gates; when the brave and the noble fell before their eyes; when palaces were transformed to hospitals, and the beggar and the prince alike cried aloud to heaven for a morsel of bread for their famishing infants—even then were the churches of the Most High desecrated by schism, and false preachers deluded the divided people, till in very madness they were ready to fall upon each other, both parties imagining, in the fury of their zeal, that heaven only demanded the sacrifice of the opposing sect, as a retribution for its apostacy.

The misery of the Romans was at its height. Worn out and dispirited, even the most faithful began to despair. The siege had now lasted more than a month; and as the eyes of the wretched citizens rested upon the boundless view of the Turkish camp, hope died in every breast. The last hour was nearly come. The city could not hold out

another day, and it was determined that one furious sally should take place, and that, surrounded by a chosen troop, Constantine should endeavour to cut his way through the camp of the enemy.

It was the middle of May, and the bright sun of summer shone gladly on the city of the doomed. The famishing and the wounded turned with a sickening shudder from the bright ray ; but from none did the sob of agony burst with a more bitter pang than from the breast of the young monarch, as he looked upon the rising beam—and knew that ere sunset, from the spot where he stood, the crescent might gleam and the banner of the Infidel wave ! To perish nobly, sword in hand, was the only hope that was left ; and as, after having first attended a solemn mass, and received the sacrament in the church of Santa Sophia, the brave band of soldiers gathered slowly in the open space before the gate of the city, the stern brow of many might have been seen to relax, as with one long look they bade adieu to home and to life.

One by one, and in silence, the officers took their appointed stations ; and when the devoted troop, headed by their young and gallant sovereign,

marched onwards, towards the principal gate, many a bold heart swelled, and many a cheek grew pale, as the cry of anguish from balcony or lattice told that upon their doomed heads fond eyes were looking their last.

Close behind the Emperor, came Elphenor and Demetrius, faithful even unto death ! The word was given. Already the head of the column had entered the narrow street leading to the towers upon the wall, when the hand of Elphenor was suddenly grasped by Constantine, who had turned to look once more upon the scene he was about to quit for ever. That flash upon the bosom of the waters ! Whence came it ? None could answer, ere the sullen boom of the gun had startled every ear. The brave troop had halted before the word of their sovereign could reach them. Another and another shot was heard, and then the quick discharge of the lesser guns peculiar to the Turkish vessels, showed that the conflict had begun. The firing was from far below the port. Hope dawned in every bosom, and every heart stood still until the smoke had cleared away, and then a cry of exultation broke from the lips of Constantine.

“ They have not forgotten me !” he exclaimed, pointing to the stately galleys of Genoa, which now appeared upon the waters of the Bosphorus.

“ My people, ye shall yet be saved ;” cried Constantine, as he bounded forward towards the rising ground, which commanded a more extended view of the straits.

His hope was not deceived. The promised succour was at hand ; and no sooner had the intelligence been made known, than all order was forgotten in the city. The inhabitants rushed into the streets, and, mingling with the soldiers and the priests, pressed onwards, until the Seven Hills were one mass of living beings ; while a shout of joy burst from the multitude, till the heavens re-echoed its sound. Hope lighted up every face, and the people, thus suddenly snatched from despair, gave themselves up to the extravagance of joy, encouraging, by their cries, the efforts which their gallant friends were making, to force the line of Ottoman ships which guarded the entrance to the port.

Meanwhile the Sultan was not idle. Alarmed by the firing, he had quitted his camp, and

mounting his horse, hastened to the nearest point from which he could obtain a distinct view of the Bosphorus. One glance showed him the Genoese vessels already advanced to within a short distance of the port. The evident inferiority of his naval force, added to the frenzy with which he viewed the impending succour that promised to the Christians a chance of escape. Maddened by the prospect of delay, if not failure, at the moment when he knew that the resources of the city were exhausted, he gave way to the most violent expressions of rage; at one time urging the noble steed that bore him into the midst of the waves; at another, threatening with instant death, not only the Capitan Pacha, Baltha Oglou, but every sailor on board his fleet; and then again, as success seemed to waver, encouraging, by word and gesture, the very persons he had just denounced, as though imagining that his voice could reach them through the roar of the battle.

The scene at this instant was most exciting and splendid. Hemmed in by sea and land, the seven hilled city lay in her helpless beauty, in the very arms of her foe; and struggling to her relea

came the brave Giustiniani, with his followers, from Genoa and Venice, fighting their way through the Infidel fleet, which, as a swarm of locusts, darkened the face of the waters. Far away to the East stretched the forests of the Asiatic shore, losing themselves in the deep shadow of the mountains; while the more gentle Western hills, covered with the Ottoman tents, were gleaming in the morning sun, white as the summit of Olympus; and beneath, upon the bosom of that narrow strait, whose shores smiled in the gladness of their beauty, the blue wave was reddening in the death struggle of that spirit which never sleeps—the strife between man and man.

More than once the hearts of the Christians trembled, as the power of numbers threatened to prevail. The odds were fearful. But at length the triumph of discipline became apparent, and the five noble vessels forced their way through a fleet of three hundred sail, and safely anchored within the port of the Golden Horn.

With tears of joy Constantine and his people welcomed their brave allies, and the supplies of corn, and of money, with the efficient aid of four

hundred men, again raised the spirits of the Christians.

The desperation of the Sultan increased every moment. The siege was renewed with vigour; and the day after the arrival of Giustiniani, his eyes were greeted by a sight of such unequalled barbarity as almost to strike the beholders with madness. All night long the air had been filled with shrieks of the most heart-rending distress; but it was not till the morning that the cause was revealed to the besieged, when the opposite side of the ditch presented a forest of upright spikes, upon each of which the brutal Mahomet had caused a Christian prisoner to be impaled; and the heat of the sun increasing the misery of those who still survived the tortures of the night, their piteous cries for water filled the breasts of the hearers with horror and despair.

Distracted by the impossibility of affording relief to the suffering wretches, the usual gentleness and humanity of the Christian Emperor forsook him; and ordering every Turkish prisoner to the walls, they were instantly beheaded, and their bodies left exposed to the view of their countrymen. Each

day added fresh horrors to the siege, until the busy brain of Mahomet devised a scheme unequalled in daring and skill. In the dead of the night, the neck of land which runs behind the suburb of Galata, was completely covered over, the boards being rendered slippery by the fat of oxen rubbed upon them. A road was thus contrived, by which the port of the Golden Horn might be reached ; and during the darkness, no less than seventy ships were safely drawn across the Isthmus by the force of pullies and the united strength of thousands, driven by the scourge to perform a feat apparently beyond the power of man.

The following day, terror seized upon the Christians. Seventy Turkish vessels were riding at anchor in the bosom of their harbour. To defend themselves on both sides was impossible ; and sword in hand, the Emperor once more put himself at the head of his troops, now nerved to iron by despair. The evident treachery of the Genoese merchants of Galata redoubled the apprehension within the city ; while the Ottoman troops, wild with the excitement of delay, clamoured for permission for a general assault.

Still the Sultan hesitated. Almanzor declared the heavens unpropitious; but at length, overcome by the anxiety of Mahomet, the Astrologer pronounced the fatal word. The 29th of May was chosen as the auspicious day by the conjunction of the planets, and the Sultan proclaimed that honour and reward, according to his option, should be the portion of him who first stood upon the walls of Constantinople. But while his words breathed kindness, his heart was steeled to all human feeling, and he only waited the rising of the sun to effect a diabolical scheme, by which he secured from failure his final attempt upon the city.

He caused a proclamation to be made through the camp, inviting every artisan and follower to assemble before the walls; and thus having collected an immense crowd of unsuspecting wretches, he, at the head of his Janissaries, charged upon the unoffending multitude, forcing them onward until the ditch was filled with living beings; and the Janissaries, rushing to the attack, drowned the cries of the victims with shouts of "Alláh! Alláh!"

The doom of the city was sealed. The angle of the tower above the gate of St. Romanus, gave

way before the battery which played upon it ; the crumbling stone fell with a heavy crash into the ditch ; and Constantine, wearing his crown and imperial mantle, appeared in the breach. Vainly were the shields of the devoted few, whose love for their Emperor made them heedless of self, interposed to ward off the blows which were heaped upon him ! With one hand, the brave Demetrius tore from his shoulders the purple mantle which marked the Emperor to the eyes of all, while with the other he tried to parry the attacks directed at him, until a stroke from a sabre cleft his own helmet. Bewildered by the blow, he scarcely heeded the voice which summoned him to surrender, nor perceived that the soldier who twined his arms around him, seemed more anxious to protect than to injure. The Janissary stooped to the ear of Demetrius. One word appeared suddenly to revive the spirit of the young Greek, and his eye brightened as he permitted the friendly hand of his victor to drag him beneath the shelter of a projecting buttress.

The Emperor was still unhurt. Step by step, and inch by inch, the Christians disputed the

ground with their enemies, who, in overwhelming numbers, now mounted the breach, till at length, a cry from Giustiniani, as he received a wound, caught the ear of Demetrius. For an instant, Constantine turned his head to implore—to command the Italian to stay and rally his flinching followers, who were retreating from the walls. That instant was fatal! A blow from a Janissary pierced the heart of the monarch. He sank upon his knee, and tried to raise his shield above his head; but the effort was vain. His arm drooped—the sword fell from his grasp; and in another moment, the last Emperor of the Greeks—Constantine, the young, the noble, and the brave, was numbered with the dead!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE fall of their Emperor was the signal of defeat to the unhappy Greeks, who, no longer sustained by the spirit and courage of their brave Prince, bent to the conquering foe, as grass before the scythe. All opposition ceased, and those who encountered the full tide of the torrent of enemies, which now poured in on all sides, were either slain or made prisoners.

Intoxicated with joy, which, for the time, gave to his character a want of caution foreign to its nature, Mahomet entered the city. Forgetting, in his pride, that it was his own interest to preserve, in all its splendour, the conquest which he had achieved, he himself gave the example of the most wanton excesses, striking and mutilating, with insane ferocity, even the most beautiful works of art that lay upon his passage. He paused, for an instant, on reaching the Hippodrome; his en-

lightened taste seemed to forbid such profanation ; but when his eyes fell upon the splendid monuments of each era of science and of art collected upon the spot, a savage smile again gleamed upon his features ; and as though to spare any thing prized by the Christians were an act of too much leniency, he raised once more his ponderous battle-axe, and with a blow struck off one of the heads of the brazen serpents, which formed the celebrated column in the centre of the arena.

Encouraged by his example, the work of devastation was continued by his followers, and the city was instantly a scene of pillage and of blood. The shrieking inhabitants submitted in vain. All were massacred who had not succeeded in obtaining a temporary concealment.

In the midst of this scene of horror, one spot alone offered a contrast so striking as to afford a lamentable demonstration of the power of superstition and credulity over fear. For some time past it had been announced to the people, by one of those impostors, who, in all ages, have found it possible to delude, at least a portion of their hearers, that, in a vision from heaven, it had been

revealed to him, that, in the event of the fall of Constantine, the Sultan would enter the city ; but upon his arrival at a particular spot, his power against the Christians would cease, and the angel of the Lord would stand, with a drawn sword, to prevent the entrance of the Infidels into the church of Saint Sophia ! So firmly had this delusion taken hold of the mind of the people, that the interior of the immense structure was filled — not with the shrieking or the faint, but with citizens and priests, merchants and nobles, artisans and soldiers,—all calm and collected, sustained by their blind credulity, and patiently awaiting the supernatural delivery they had so long been taught to expect. It was a bitter sight, to see the old and grey-headed, the mailed warrior and the bearded sage, trying to infuse into the minds of the weeping and terrified women within the church, not the spirit of resignation befitting all Christians, but the impious feeling of certainty, that a miracle was about to be performed for their relief, and that the will of God encouraged this blind reliance, which forbade all human effort at escape.

Such were the doctrines that resounded on all

sides, and many listened and were appeased ; for in Constantinople superstition was at its height, and the host of fanatics which had that day poured from the monasteries and convents of the city into the sacred edifice of Saint Sophia, was for the most part incapable of aught but a blind submission to the dictates of others.

There was one, however, who stood apart from the mass. Ida, the loved and loving wife of Elphenor was there, with her infant child. Alone, and unprotected, she sought not in that infatuated crowd for counsel or consolation ; but, kneeling at the foot of the cross, she raised in her trembling arms the sleeping form of Melanthe, imploring for her beloved child that release from danger and from death which she dared not hope for herself !

Absorbed by her prayers, and the deep sorrowing of her already widowed heart, she did not observe the sudden movement which had taken place within the building. It was as though a sharp gust of wind had passed over the bosom of a lake, so immediate was the rocking to and fro of the sea of heads which covered the immense floor of the church. The deadened sound of many voices

hushed to a whisper followed—every one seemed to have asked some question of his neighbour—then all again was silent and still ! Each gallery, nook, and window, crowded to excess, appeared as if filled with statues. The monks suspended their preaching—the fanatic was struck dumb—children forgot to weep, and nuns to pray,—and even the trembling mother hushed her sob in that moment of horrible suspense, made yet more horrible by the utter uncertainty of the quarter from whence the alarm had proceeded.

That there was cause for alarm no heart in that vast assembly dared to deny. The freezing chill of terror was visible on every brow. Each stood as though turned to stone—while, within the breast, that deep storehouse of deceit and falsehood, which, if closed to other eyes, yet is open to our own, at the first angry glance of heaven, human fallacies, and human strength withered and vanished - - - Danger was at hand—danger and death in its most fearful form. Who should now save them ? who could save them, but the God whom they had impiously braved by their trust in human aid ? and as if this truth at once rushed to every heart, the whole of the trembling multitude simultaneously sunk upon their

Alas ! it was too late for hope. In another instant the dreadful fate that was approaching was made manifest to them. The crowds which had filled the upper galleries of the church were seen hurrying from the windows ; and the fearful cries of “ They are coming ! they are coming !—they have passed the square—barricade the doors,” were soon drowned in the shrieks of the multitude. The predictions of their false prophets were as air ; and the unhappy people thus found themselves without hope of escape ! Their eyes were opened !—they now saw how they had been deceived ; and when this bitter conviction forced itself upon them, the cry of despair and agony which arose almost made the Moslem tigers quail, whilst about to spring upon their prey.

The unhappy Ida, startled from her devotions, gazed wildly round ; but not one glance of sympathy met her eye ! Each was thinking of himself, till the broken accents of a foreign tongue fell upon her ear ; and kneeling by her side she perceived the form of Hassan, who, dressed as a Greek, had followed her from the house of Elphenor. In the midst of her own sorrow the look of the unhappy Mussulman pierced the kind heart of Ida. If the

fate of the Greeks was certain, how much more so was the fate of him who had betrayed his sovereign. The tortures which would be his portion were already portrayed upon his face ; and Ida, desirous of imparting some comfort, endeavoured, in the pauses of the din which filled the church, to instil some feeling of courage into his mind.

“ Hassan !” she said, “ you have eaten of our bread, and drank of our cup, if I fall—you will protect my child ?”

“ When was a Mussulman ever ungrateful ?” was the only answer of the trembling Hassan ; and, as he spoke, he stretched out his arms towards the infant.

“ Not yet, not yet !” cried Ida, distractedly, clasping Melanthe closer to her breast : “ but take these jewels ; if you escape, they will be of service to you,” and she put into his hand a small packet.

“ Hark ! that is their cry ! Holy Prophet, protect us !” gasped the terrified Hassan. “ Lady ! haste further back, among the shrines. Oh ! God of heaven, they come ! Hark !—how they batter the door - - - does it yield ? No, no ; thousands press against it. Again, Holy Alláh ! the cries of

the Janissaries wax louder—the door - - - it opens. Oh, Father of Mercy !—Holy Prophet ! we are lost ;” and the miserable Hassan fell down behind a pillar, covering his face with his garment, imagining that, notwithstanding his having adopted the dress of the Greeks, he must instantly be discovered, and that the first vengeance of the Infidels would fall upon him.

Then commenced that horrible scene of butchery and violence, unsurpassed in the annals of history, where thousands of helpless, unarmed creatures were slaughtered in a moment ; while those who were spared knew that they were only reserved for a still worse fate, and looked with envy on the lifeless around !

Twice had the high spirited Ida, as she marked the separation of some of the youngest and fairest of the nuns from their more aged sisterhood, drawn from her bosom the poniard which she treasured as a last resource ; but each time the helpless babe she held had cried as it found itself disturbed, and that cry had overcome the firmness of the heart upon which its infant head was pillowed. Could she abandon her child ? With a movement of desper-

tion, Ida cast the dagger from her hand, and burying her head upon the face of Melanthe, remained for a little while concealed by the projection of an altar, until she was dragged from her hiding place by some Turkish soldiers, who, satiated with slaughter, were selecting those they thought worthy to be carried off as prisoners. A few words, in a tone of insult, indistinctly reached her ear ; but as she was forced along, one of the barbarians perceived the child, and instantly seized upon it. Ida broke from the grasp of the soldiers, and throwing herself at the feet of a Turk, who appeared of a higher grade than his companions, she implored him to have pity on her—to restore her child.

“ It is the child of Elphenor !—I am his wife ! You shall have gold,” she exclaimed ; but she had unconsciously thrown fuel on the flame, for, with an insulting laugh, the men only the more rudely forced her onwards, while their comrade turning round, cast the infant from his arms. The terrible shriek of the unhappy mother half diverted his attention ; and he did not see that a friendly hand had caught the babe, ere it was dashed to pieces on the marble floor. But Ida had seen it. In that moment of terror,

of agony, and of blood, the mother's eye had seen a form she knew, rise up to snatch the innocent from death. Hassan, whom she had tended, now saved for her that life far dearer than her own. She had seen him fold the infant to his breast, and had blessed him as she looked. It was the last look of the mother upon her child !

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSTANTINOPLE had fallen ! The glory of the empire of the Greeks had perished, and for ever ! and in the palace of the Cæsars, dwelt their most deadly foe ! Mahomet, the Sultan of the Ottomans, had given, in accordance with his oath, the lives and heritage of the Christians to his Moslem subjects.

On the third day after his entrance into the city, he seemed for the first time to awake from the dream of insane delight, into which he had been plunged by success ; and issued an edict, by which the Turks were commanded to abstain from further plunder or deeds of violence. He at length appeared to remember, that the blood that flowed around him, was now drawn from the breasts of his own subjects. But with this order ended all exertion which the Sultan appeared disposed to make.

Satisfied as to the death of Constantine, whose

body had been found under a heap of slain, so covered with wounds, that the imperial features could not be distinguished, and that the golden eagles worked upon his shoes, alone testified his rank, Mahomet had contented himself with the cowardly act of ordering the head of the Emperor to be exposed above the gate of St. Romanus, the post which he had so long and gallantly defended. The mighty Sultan then abandoned himself to his pleasures, little imagining that within the walls of his palace, which now contained all that was fairest and noblest among the Christian women, he should meet with an opposition so determined, as to engross that time and attention, which ought to have been devoted to his subjects.

But so it was ; and a suppliant at the feet of the beauteous Ida, Mahomet had condescended to remain, from the hour when her matchless charms had shown him the inferiority of all he had hitherto deemed peerless. Perhaps it was the novelty of the situation, which caught the sated fancy of the Monarch—perhaps it was the charm of meeting for the first time in a woman's form, a mind above disguise, and a soul above fear.

The intellect of Mahomet was capable of such distinction; and it appeared as though some secret influence had suddenly arisen, to induce a restraint of those unbridled passions, which had hitherto raged without a check.

The unhappy Ida was bowed down by grief. Notwithstanding all her entreaties, her husband's fate still remained concealed from her, while that of her child was equally uncertain. Surrounded by the slaves of the Sultan, who possibly were as ignorant as they pretended to be, Ida could gain no intelligence of what passed without; and yet, in the midst of woes so terrible, the spirit of the noble woman did not fail. Well versed in the character and temper of the tyrant who assailed her, she forebore to reproach or to irritate; and concealing her wretchedness beneath an appearance of calm dignity, she continued to maintain over the mind of Mahomet the ascendancy she had gained. Thus had many days elapsed; and the Sultan, yielding to the fascination which enthralled him, turned from the willing and the weak, with whom his harem was crowded, to the novel task of endeavouring to soften the proud Christian beauty, whose firmness

and reliance upon the God to whom she prayed for support, while he openly attempted to deride, he secretly respected.

At such a time, the seclusion to which the Sultan devoted himself, was an event so unlooked for, that from impatience the public feeling rose to indignation; and as the promises which had been held out, seemed in no way likely to be realized, a spirit of rebellion sprung into life, which the undisciplined state of the troops rendered of vital consequence. So rapidly did this feeling spread, that at length the Mufti undertook to represent to his sublime master the disaffection of the people, who, greedy of reward, murmured loudly against the edict forbidding further plunder, and claimed the promised recompence for their protracted labours during the siege. The news produced in the bosom of the Sultan a revolution of feeling so violent, that all effort at self-controul was unavailing.

Well might Ida tremble afresh, as she marked the look of ferocity which lighted up, with the fury of a demon, the handsome countenance of her royal suitor; and her heartsunk, as, one morning

at an earlier hour than usual, she beheld him enter her apartment. For a little while he looked upon her without speaking; then advancing towards her, he took her hand with unusual gentleness, and the courage of Ida grew more faint, as she listened to accents almost faltering, from emotion.

“Ida,” said Mahomet, “the hour has come when your own words must decide upon your fate. The leisure of the Sultan of the Ottomans is not his own. Already my people murmur. Thou art the cause!—The slaves,” he added more fiercely, “dare to question their master, and complain of the time that I give to thee.”

“Listen—oh, listen to their voice,” exclaimed Ida. “Return to great deeds, and leave me to die in peace; or,” she continued, as for the first time she threw herself at the feet of Mahomet, “as you are mighty, be generous; restore me to my husband, and my child, if indeed they still live.”

The attitude of Ida was so touching, her voice so soft, that Mahomet for an instant appeared to hesitate, as if some better feeling was struggling with the determination he had formed. She was so beautiful as she knelt before him, with tears like the

dew upon the rose leaf, glittering on her cheek ; while the impassioned tenderness of her dove-like eyes, as she thought upon those so dear to her, seemed to irradiate her whole form, that a human heart could scarcely steel itself against her prayers ; but Mahomet, when the fierce passions, which formed the prominent features of his character, were once aroused within him, had not a human heart. Still the love which the beauty and holiness of Ida had kindled in the bosom of the tyrant, partook more of softness than any feeling he had ever before experienced ; again the cruel look somewhat faded from his countenance, and raising Ida from the ground, he said,

“ For the last time, I ask you to be mine. Ida, I love you, as I never before have believed it possible to love. Cannot my affection atone to you for what you have lost ? You shall be my wife. The bride of the Sultan is no mean estate —— ”

“ Urge me no more,” replied Ida firmly ; “ my life is your’s ; my honour is my own—and my husband’s,” she added faintly, as she raised her eyes to heaven, “ even should he have quitted this earth for ever ! ”

“ Ida !” said Mahomet quickly, “ your husband lives, and is unhurt.”

A cry of rapture from his poor captive interrupted the words of the Sultan. He paused, and looked almost sadly upon the woman whose faith and affection were so much stronger than her fear. “ Shall I ever be loved even as this woman loves ?” was his secret thought, as he gazed upon Ida with reverence. But she saw him not ;—her thoughts were with the captive in his dungeon, and her beloved child ; and in that paroxysm of agony her mind glanced back to the tenderness of other days—the happiness of their peaceful home—the blessings of their mutual love ; and, as the recollection of later events rushed to her thoughts, and the misery of separation, the fear of dishonour, and the agony of suspense again darkened the vision of brightness conjured up by the name of her husband, Ida turned her eyes to him who stood by her side.

Mahomet, the author of all this woe, was now a suppliant for her love. Disregarding the shudder which accompanied her look, the Sultan spoke once more :—

“ Yes, Ida ! your husband lives. Listen to my

words. You refuse to enter my harem—I have not enforced what you have refused. In return for this forbearance, promise me that you will become its inmate but for even for one day, nay, for one hour,” he added hastily, as he marked the look of horror on the face of his captive; “for one hour only; and I swear by all that a Mussulman holds most sacred, that the next shall see you restored to the arms of Elphenor. Think, Ida, of what you renounce—a life of happiness—of wealth—with the husband you love—the child in whom you delight. Think, ere you refuse the prayer of one who might command, yet stoops to implore,—will you not save your husband?”

The head of Ida was bowed upon her hands, but the long slender fingers could not conceal the burning blush which crimsoned the face of the unhappy woman. It was the struggle of a noble nature against temptation almost too powerful. The life of her husband and child—her own liberty—perhaps even her existence; and the tempter was a monarch, young, handsome, and to her, generous; for to her had he not altered his manner, nay his very nature seemed changed, since he had learned to

love. For one instant Ida hesitated ; but a mind like her's could not contemplate dishonour. Slowly the colour faded from her cheek, and, as she raised her head, the marble fixedness of her brow, and the compression of her pale lips, told Mahomet that his prayer was refused, ere her low distinct accents met his ear.

“ The wife of a Christian,” she said, “ may not hearken to such words.”

“ Ida ! think—are you resolved ?” cried Mahomet, passionately.

“ I am ; to welcome death before dishonour ;” calmly replied the unhappy woman, lifting her eyes meekly to Heaven.

The Sultan did not answer, but strode fiercely to and fro in the chamber. He was evidently lashing himself into fury, and deigned no further to remonstrate or implore. The days since he had known Ida he had passed as though in a trance. His dream had been of love—he awoke to hatred. As he passed a window of the palace, the sound of many voices met his ear, and he could see the crowds gathering in the open space of the Hippodrome. Once more he approached Ida. “ My people,” he

said, "have dared to murmur that I have given to you those hours which should have been devoted to their interests. Suffer me to show them the cause of my neglect. The prisoners too await their doom, and all are gathered before the Palace gates. Let me lead you thither, your husband will be there."

Thus saying, he took the hand of the astonished Ida, and leading her forth, she soon found herself in the centre of a circle, which, opening as the Sultan advanced, gave to her view the multitude beyond ; and, as Mahomet had predicted, at a short distance stood Elphenor, at the head of a group of panic-stricken prisoners, who doubted not they had been assembled to hear their sentence of death or torture.

The heart of Ida throbbed wildly, as she met the eye of her husband ; and the smile with which she stretched out her hands towards him relieved the noble Greek of his most dreadful fear. His Ida could not have looked thus upon the face of her husband, had she been unworthy of his love. Meanwhile the Sultan was giving orders to those of his officers who were nearest ; and the circle was suddenly compressed by the advance of the crowd,

until Ida found herself within a few feet of the spot where Elphenor stood. With a cry she could not wholly suppress, she sprang forward, as if to throw herself upon his breast; but the quick eye of Mahomet was upon her, and catching her arm, he once again whispered, "Ida, consent, before it is too late—consent to my prayer."

"Never," said Ida, boldly, encouraged by the presence of him, for whom she would have died a thousand deaths, had it been possible.

A scowl of hate darkened the brow of Mahomet; and turning to the people, as still he held the arm of Ida, he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with passion, "It hath been told to the Sultan that his people have dared to murmur, and say that a woman, and a Christian, has turned him from his care of the true believers and followers of the Holy Prophet. Let those who audaciously question the conduct of their Prince adore the clemency which spares their rebellious lives, and learn, from his example, to sacrifice their own wishes to the general good. You see this woman—she is fair to look upon." A murmur of admiration burst from

“ It is true that I love her. Now behold how Mahomet can sever a tie which would lead him from his duty.”

Scarcely had the words passed his lips when, with a suddenness which defied all interposition, he retreated a step—the next instant the flash of a scimitar was seen, and at one blow the head of the beautiful Ida fell to the ground. A shriek from the multitude, and then the murmur of many voices filled the air; but far above all rung out *one* cry, so long and bitter, that it thrilled through every bosom of that savage crowd. It was the cry of the broken heart—the strong man’s agony; and before the order of the inhuman Sultan that the head of the murdered Ida should be given to Elphenor could be heard, Elphenor lay senseless upon the earth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE barbarous deed, which had been devised and executed by Mahomet, as a means of striking terror into the hearts of his subjects, so far produced the effect intended as to lull the growing spirit of disaffection. The Sultan, once more secure of his people, began to turn his attention towards those who remained of the former inhabitants of the city.

Besides the countless multitude of the slain, sixty thousand Greeks had been sold as slaves; and Mahomet, being somewhat appeased, now caused a proclamation to be made to the effect, that all Greeks and Romans who chose to dwell at Constantinople were at liberty to do so, and to follow their respective callings. Relieved from immediate fear of death, there arose on all sides symptoms of that servile spirit inherent in a degenerate people; and such of the Greeks, and they were not a few, who had secreted the wealth which,

properly applied, might yet have preserved them as a nation, now laid their treasures at the feet of their conqueror, with abject meanness imploring him to accept that gold, of which they declared their former sovereign to have been unworthy. Mahomet was too politic openly to encourage treachery. The only answer they received, was a bitter taunt for their avarice, and an order for instant execution.

All minor concerns having been disposed of, the vindictive nature of the Sultan burned for revenge upon an individual, against whom he cherished unbounded hatred. The treacherous correspondence of Calil Pacha with the Christians had long been

his consternation, when, one morning, as he was quietly seated in the magnificent palace Mahomet had bestowed upon him, and occupied in the agreeable calculation of the amount of treasure he had obtained, he received a summons to attend upon the Sultan; and on emerging from his palace, perceived that his usual attendants were replaced by the guard of his Royal Master, before whom he was immediately conducted.

The array in which Mahomet waited to receive him, was little calculated to re-assure the trembling culprit. Anxious to give some appearance of justice to the punishment of the first officer of his empire, the Sultan appeared seated beneath a magnificent canopy upon the throne in the Hippodrome, surrounded by his court, dressed in the habits of ceremony. The Mufti, attended by the Mollahs and the whole body of the Uléma, was present, occupying a large space on the right of the throne; while on the left, a body of Emirs, with their green turbans, rose before the eyes of the unhappy Vizier. The inner ring of the circle was lined by the Ethiop guard of the Sultan, the dark-visaged soldiers, set off by turbans of

bright scarlet; while, outside the line, which they kept with drawn swords in their hands, rose a motley group, where might be seen the long locks of the Greek mingling with the white turban of the Moslem and the high felt cap of the Dervish. But it was not upon the splendour glittering around the throne, nor yet upon the multitude crowding that arena, which, until the foot of the Moslem had trodden down its glories, had ever been the scene of joy and of triumph, that the eye of the wretched Calil lingered, until, as if fascinated by the horror the vision inspired, it could behold no other object. Close beside the throne stood four figures—negroes, so horribly deformed, that, to look upon them would have been a punishment. Their huge heads, with curly grizzled locks, and their monstrous arms, seemed scarcely to belong to the dwarfish and misshapen bodies which supported them. As they grasped the *Falaka*, or instrument of the bastinado, then turned their rolling eyes towards the unhappy Vizier, the heart of Calil Pacha sunk within him. With tottering steps, he advanced towards the throne, prostrating himself humbly before his sovereign.

The eye of Mahomet glistened with unusual ferocity, while a smile of triumph now and then indicated the inward complacency of the tyrant at having so thoroughly outwitted his enemy. As Calil rose from the ground, and laying his fingers upon his mouth and forehead, awaited the interrogatories he felt were impending, the Mufti advanced towards him, and put into his hands a scroll, upon which his accusation was inscribed. No sooner had Calil glanced his eye over the words, than he saw that his doom was sealed ! and falling upon his knees, implored the mercy of his sovereign. For a moment, Mahomet seemed to gloat upon the agony of his victim, smiling sternly as he looked upon the writhing form of Calil, who, as he addressed his prayers to the throne, kept his eye constantly fixed upon the executioners ; then the Sultan, rising with the dignity he so well knew how to assume, said—

“ Calil Pacha, thy words are as water spilled into a stream—they pass away, and the bosom of the river is still as before. So does thy speech fall on the ear of the Sultan of the Universe - - his ear closes ere the sound has passed. Calil Pacha, thou art a traitor—a drunkard—and an unfaithful

follower of the Holy Prophet!—therefore shalt thou die;—and as thy crimes have been three—so shall thy punishment be divided into three separate portions. First, for thy treachery in receiving bribes from the Christians, shalt thou be beaten with rods of gold. Next, for thy drunkenness, thou shalt be plunged in boiling wine; and, lastly, the tower of salt* shall complete the measure of the penalty thou must undergo for thy crimes!”

A shriek of agony from the Vizier followed the declaration of the Sultan; but the ferocious countenance of the young despot gave no hope of mercy; and the Vizier was much too well versed in the modes of a Turkish trial to dream of attempting any defence.

“Thou criest for mercy,” said Mahomet, with the smile of a demon, “and for thy crimes against ourselves might we be merciful; but thou hast sinned against Alláh! and the Holy Mahomet his

* The tower of salt was a large open tower, the sides of which were composed of pillars of salt, while from the floor and the roof innumerable spikes projected. The culprit was placed in a swing suspended from the roof, upon which water was gradually poured, which, slowly dissolving the pillars, at length the roof fell with a crash.

Prophet ! Behold," he continued, as he took a casket from the hands of one of the soldiers, " these jewels ; and thou," addressing himself to the Mufti and people, " listen, while I proclaim that I myself was present when, with these jewels, the Vizier attempted to bribe the Astrologer of the faithful, the great Almanzor, so to misread the stars, as to give to the Christians, from whom Calil had received these gems, time to defeat the projects of the Sultan, and scatter his soldiers in the dust."

A murmur of indignation was heard amongst the crowd.

" For the crime of impiety," continued Mahomet, when the sound had subsided, " the Prophet has declared there is no pardon." Then again addressing the Mufti as the highest officer present, he added, " Do thou take from him who was the Vizier the seal of the Sultan—and that the impious may bear no sign of a true believer, let his beard be cut off."

Thus saying, Mahomet, who always managed if possible to give a religious turn to his deeds of violence, again seated himself on his throne—the Mufti drew from the vest of Calil the great seal of

the empire, which the Vizier always carries in his breast ; and in another instant Calil Pacha, stripped of his turban and beard—the greatest indignity that can be offered to a Mussulman—was writhing in the hands of the hideous negroes. Two of them stretched him upon the machine, while the others bound his hands ; and then all four commenced beating him on the feet, hands, and body, with heavy golden rods, until the cries of the tortured man reached to the furthest parts of the arena.

In no other nation could have been found an assembly of such numbers as now covered the Hippodrome, which could have calmly looked down upon the torture of a fellow creature without exhibiting one sign of pity or disgust ;—but the Turks, habituated to repress all demonstration of feeling, stood around cold and grave, as if intent upon numbering the strokes which fell upon the victim. Soon the agony became insupportable. At every blow the blood sprung forth even to the foot of the throne ; and Mahomet with a savage grin encouraged by signs the zeal of the torturing fiends. In vain did the wretched Calil confess his crimes—in vain implore one moment's cessation of his

anguish ; his prayers were unheeded by the cruel sovereign he had betrayed, and so still was the multitude around, that he might have deemed himself alone with his executioners, had it not been for the thousand eyes which, in coldness or disdain, met his imploring glance. Every sob of the victim could be heard afar, and heavy and short they came ; for his strength was failing, and the heart-rending shriek now died upon the quivering lip.

Not half the destined number of blows had been inflicted ere the keen eye of Mahomet marked the failing strength of the unhappy Calil. To allow him to die at once, would have been to lose the sweets of revenge ; and Mahomet was about to order the suspension of the torture, when a sound arose, which for a moment distracted the attention of all around. It came from the centre of the crowd ; and the Sultan started, as he beheld an immense body of the Janissaries making their way forward, and bearing down all before them. If Mahomet could be said to stand in awe of any beings, human or divine, it was of the very body he had himself so lately re-organized, and to which such privileges had been granted, that, in the insolence of their elevation, the

Janissaries had more than once shown symptoms of a spirit very unusual in a nation of slaves. A sudden revulsion of feeling came over the Sultan, as he marked their approach ; but his fears were calmed when he beheld them halt, while one of their number advanced to the circle around the throne. But this one alone, although he appeared scarcely to have passed the age of boyhood, seemed imbued with the spirit of a thousand heroes. Fearless, and unarmed, he forced aside the guards who would have held him back, and, rushing to the foot of the throne, prostrated himself before the Sultan, demanding the instant release of the prisoner.

“ What means this insolence ? ” exclaimed Mahomet, making a sign to the negroes to desist from their horrid task.

“ May it please the Sultan of the world,” replied a voice, so sweet that it sounded like music in the air, “ to listen to his slave. I come not to crave a boon, but to claim a right.”

“ A right ? ” said Mahomet, looking contemptuously upon the youthful figure at his feet.

“ Yes, most mighty Sovereign, a right ; for thy gracious words did promise, that he who first stood

upon the walls of Constantinople should claim, as a right, all that he chose to ask. My foot was the first that entered the breach ; I have as yet asked nothing ; but he who is the light of the world, the glory of the East, and the terror of the Infidels, will not forget his words."

" Who is there who will vouch for the truth of thine ?" asked Mahomet, strangely interested by the courage and noble manner, almost verging upon haughtiness, yet blended with a softness scarce belonging to a man.

" Isfendar, the Agha of the Janissaries ; nay, all who survived that hour, will bear witness of my truth," said the youth proudly. " My foot was first upon the walls, and the hand that first planted the crescent on the Christian tower was mine. I ask not for gold or power ; grant me but the captive of my sword, Demetrius of Ypsara, and," pointing to the bleeding Vizier, " what remains of life in that poor old man, and thy servant is satisfied."

The voice of the speaker faltered as the names of the prisoners passed his lips, as though some secret linked his fate with theirs ; and the brow of Mahomet grew dark, for his tyrant heart ever

trembled as any mystery suggested the idea of treason.

“What means this strange request?” he asked, at the same time bending on the young Janissary a look so keen, that he bowed his head beneath it.

“Young man, thou hast chosen ill—take what thou wilt of gold and gems—nay, the fairest province of my empire shall be thine—but know that the hours of the prisoners are already numbered—they die before the sun has set.”

“No, they shall not die,” said the youth, starting to his feet, but with a shriek that ill became the courage of a soldier, “I have redeemed their lives. The promise of the Sultan is sacred. I ask but justice—I pray but for my own; it is a wife who prays for her husband—a child for her parent. I am the daughter of the Vizier!”—and throwing off the turban and beard of the Janissary, she drew the long black tresses of her hair partly over her face, and, trembling with shame and fear as she quitted her disguise, *Chezmé knel* before the Sultan.

A murmur of admiration rose on all sides, but in none did the feeling glow so fervently, as in

breast of him who betrayed the least emotion ; the daring of Chezmé was so different from the usual character of Turkish women, and so congenial to the ardent spirit of Mahomet, that he gazed for some time in total silence upon the slight girlish form of the being before him, who could hazard such a deed, for the sake of those she loved ; and if the memory of Ida recurred to him, it was with a pang more of sorrow than of anger, as he confessed to himself, that the devotion of woman surpassed the things of earth.

“ How,” said Mahomet gently, “ thou art that Chezmé, of whom I have heard so much ?”

“ I am Chezmé, the daughter of Calil Pacha. I fled from Adrianople, to avoid marrying one I did not love ; and in the disguise of a Dervish braved the dangers of the Turkish camp, to watch over the interests of those who were dear to me, and to serve them if I could.”

“ And thou hast served them !” exclaimed Mahomet—“ nobly served them ; and thy courage shall be rewarded. For thy sake, the Sultan will stay his wrath, and revoke his words—the prisoners are free—and have leave to depart ; and thou, Chezmé,

shalt choose in what province of the empire, a palace shall be erected for thee."

Chezmé could only answer by her tears; and Mahomet, with the feeling of gladness which must sometimes enter the heart of man, however depraved, when conscious of having done a good action, descended from his throne; and mounting his horse, took his way to the church of Saint Sophia, now converted into a mosque, to be present at the public thanksgiving he had ordered, for the success of his arms against Constantinople.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT the moment when Hassan had caught the child of Ida, as the barbarian had snatched it from her arms with the intention of dashing it on the ground, the rage of the Mussulmen for blood had somewhat abated. Tired with slaughter, their cruel fury no longer sought for victims; and, contented with making prisoners, they drove before them all those who remained within the church.

Step by step, Hassan had retreated with his charge—now cowering behind a pillar—now protected by the frantic groups which endeavoured to oppose or avoid the advancing Mussulmen. At length, farther retreat seemed impossible; and Hassan, crouching behind a marble shrine, upon which stood a figure of the Virgin, awaited the death he no longer expected to escape. With Melanthe clasped to his breast, he knelt upon the pavement, his forehead pressed against the back

of the pedestal which supported the statue. For some time, so great was his terror, that he was not conscious that the support against which he leaned was gradually giving way; but at length, to his joy, he perceived that the pedestal was hollow, and by pressing the moulded edge of the panel, he easily forced it back sufficiently to admit his hand. There, however, all his discovery seemed to terminate. No exertion of strength could move the marble doors either farther apart or into their original position. The hope which had lighted in his bosom was quickly extinguished, and again, the unhappy Hassan sought refuge from despair in that spirit of resignation to his fate to which all Mussulmen turn in the hour of danger.

The scene within the church had now changed. The Sultan had sworn, that ere sunset the magnificent Saint Sophia should be a Turkish mosque; and as all ornaments therein are forbidden, by the Moslem religion, the fury of slaughter was exchanged for the demolition of inanimate objects. Painting and statues, monuments and altars, rare marble and the rich mosaic of the pavement and walls were torn from their places, and hurled in a c

fused mass into the centre of the building. Trembling with fear, Hassan beheld from his concealment the work of devastation, and clinging still closer to the marble, what was his surprise, as the blows of the huge hammer of one of the Infidels struck at the base of the pedestal, to see the panels gradually recede. With difficulty he suppressed a cry of delight as another blow and another, working probably on some secret spring, still further enlarged the aperture.

Without delay, Hassan darted into the cavity, supporting Melanthe with one arm, while with the other he felt his way. He had not proceeded far when a sudden gleam of light flashed upon his path, sufficient to show him what appeared an interminable flight of steps; and then a heavy fall above, and the rolling of detached stones beneath his feet, told him that his retreat was cut off. He was so bewildered by the idea of being thus buried beneath the church, that at first he could scarcely rejoice in his escape from immediate destruction; but a little while restored his senses. Cautiously descending, after infinite toil, and being obliged constantly to retrace his steps, he reached

the vaults below the church, which, though Hassan could not be aware of the fact, had been used during the siege as a general depository of property.

Here another difficulty presented itself. On every side, the way was hemmed in by objects which he could not distinguish. More than once, he sat down to collect, if possible, from the sounds which reached him from above, some information as to his position. Though mellowed by distance, he could still hear the well-known Moslem cry : and now and then a heavy crash announced that the work of destruction was not yet completed. Sick at heart, the unhappy Hassan again attempted to pursue his way, when, as he stood uncertain how

As he stood at the mouth of the vault, his first impulse was to return thanks to God for his delivery from peril, for Hassan was a good Mussulman. His next, was to ascertain how far his removal from immediate danger might conduce to his ultimate escape. To reach the shore, and seek for safety in some land where the Moslem name was heard without fear, was the ardent desire of Hassan. The straits were crowded with ships of all nations; but how to traverse a city in the hands of his most deadly foe (for by his desertion of his sovereign he had incurred the penalty of an apostate), was more than the prolific brain of Hassan could speedily determine.

To avoid detection, he had assumed the dress of a Greek, with the language of whose nation he was well acquainted; and though he had contrived to secrete the jewels and money with which he had quitted the Turkish camp, as well as those given to him by Ida, they were for the moment rendered useless by the peculiarity of his situation. No hope remained, except to avail himself of the coming darkness in order to reach the shore; and, retreating within the shelter of the vault, Hassan waited patiently, until the twinkling of the stars

gave notice that day had faded from the earth. But he had ill calculated, when he supposed that the victorious Mussulmen would so quickly resume their habits of decorum and tranquillity during the hours of night. No sooner had he emerged from his hiding place, than sounds of merriment, unusual in a Turkish camp, greeted his ear. Though the slaughter had ceased, yet more than one unhappy Greek was sacrificed, in mere wantonness of spirit, by straggling parties of the victors, who, despite the Moslem law, were all intoxicated. The gravity of the Turks was replaced by the most frantic demonstrations of joy and ferocity; and well might Hassan tremble, as, taking advantage of the shadow the long and narrow street afforded, he endeavoured to follow in the wake of a body of soldiers, who, as they passed on, filled the air with their shouts, and wantonly struck at every object within their reach.

A great part of the town had been traversed in this manner, and Hassan still hoped to reach the shore undiscovered, when an accident threatened to bring instant death upon him. Melanthe, who had hitherto remained passive, now alarmed by the shouts of the soldiers, began to cry violently, and

the sound catching the ear of the hindmost of the drunken troop, it halted. Hassan could see in the twilight, the flashing of their scimitars, and the glimmer of their white turbans, as the Ottoman soldiers rushed towards him, in the savage hope of adding another to their list of victims. Frantic with terror, Hassan turned upon his steps; and ignorant of the position in which he stood, he took the first path which presented itself, and fled down the narrow street, pursued by the Turks, whose cries grew more fierce as their victim seemed to elude their grasp.

He had nearly reached the end of the street, when, to his horror, he perceived, not twenty yards in advance, a similar body of soldiers to that from which he fled. The new comers were armed with torches, which they brandished with the fury of madmen. Already the unhappy fugitive seemed to feel the glare upon his brow—his knees trembled—his hands shook; another second, and all would have been over, when the light falling on the opposite side of the street, revealed to his eager glance the open door of a dwelling which stood retired from the rest, and was of larger dimensions than those by

which it was surrounded. One bound, and Hassan was safe within its walls. The heavy door closed behind him, and he sunk exhausted within its shelter. Not long, however, could he remain in peace. The heavy blows upon the door, and the savages cries with which they were accompanied, as, with the tenacity of drunken rage, the Turks seemed resolved upon the pursuit they had commenced, warned Hassan to depart. A flight of marble stairs was made visible by a light which gleamed from an open door above. Hassan bounded up the steps, and stood within the chamber.

Alas! what a sample did it afford of the horrors which had been that day enacted within the city! Across the threshold lay the body of a man in the prime of life; while farther on, extended on a couch, was the lifeless form of one whom not even the love of a husband could shield from the fury of the victors! The young and beauteous head was almost severed from the body, and the jewelled girdle, torn from the slender waist, lay broken and trampled on the floor. A whole history was in that broken clasp - - - and the heart of Hassan swelled, as he thought upon the wrongs of his own child, and

gazed on the pallid face of the young wife who had seen her husband vainly butchered before her eyes !

But the blows of the pursuers grew louder and louder. Hassan looked hastily around. There was food upon the table, and a lamp still gleamed from an alcove. A sudden thought seemed to strike upon his mind. Seizing a mantle which lay upon the ground, he carefully wrapped Melanthe within its folds ; then, having provided himself with all the food he could carry, he took the lamp, and descending the stairs, resolved to seek for shelter in the vaulted passages which he knew composed the lower part of every Grecian palace. Scarcely had he discovered the steps which led from the hall, when the blows which had continued to pour upon the door suddenly ceased, and then, with a roar which froze the blood of the fugitive, a thunder of assault commenced, and in another instant, his last hope was gone, the door yielded, and ere Hassan could partially close that by which he descended, a score of turbaned heads were visible in the entrance.

Catching the glimmer of the light, with shouts of Alláh ! Alláh ! the infuriated Turks, driven to madness by the effects of the wine they had swal-

lowed, rushed upon his steps; but Hassan had gained an advantage which he was too prudent to lose, and onward he flew with the haste that fear alone can give. With the speed of light, he traversed the gloomy passages before him, and still the cries of his enemies sounded in his ear, when—oh! joy! is it the ocean that he has gained? Water sparkles before him—where is he? The groined arch above his head, the fluted pillar by his side, the marble steps on which he treads, Hassan sees none of these—a boat—a small and solitary boat, lay moored upon the dark bosom of the tide. One moment, and the chain sinks in the wave, and Hassan and his infant charge have trusted their safety to the frail bark, which shoots like an arrow from the shore.

CHAPTER XXX.

IMPELLED by the vigorous arm of Hassan, the shouts of whose pursuers still rung in his ears, the light skiff darted forwards over the smooth surface of the water; and it was not until a long interval of unbroken silence had calmed his terrors, that he relaxed his efforts. Then, for the first time, he observed the impenetrable depth of gloom by which he was surrounded. It might be the flicker of the lamp which he had placed in the stern of the boat, which cheated the eye of Hassan, as he glanced fearfully around, but yet it was strange - - - and an insurmountable presentiment of danger gradually stole over the spirit of joy with which he had quitted the shore. An hour or more must have elapsed, and still every where the same objects met his view; the meeting of the arch above his head, while a forest of pillars seemed to rise on every side, and below the waveless deep—black, sullen, and horribly calm, like the darkness of a despairing soul,

Hassan trembled as the chill of that terrible ocean vault seemed to freeze the blood in his veins ; and wrapping the poor infant he had saved, still more closely in the folds of its mantle, he laid it upon his bosom.

It slept :—and Hassan gazed upon its little face, until the tears bedewed his own. Had he snatched it from one fate, to yield it to another too frightful to contemplate ! a living tomb—a tomb among the waters ;—and he thought of the silvery ocean studded with white-sailed ships ; and shuddering, looked down upon the still, black lake, stranger alike to the glimmer of the midnight star, or the smile of the gay sunbeam.

Into what mysterious cavern had the fate of the unhappy Hassan driven him ? More than once did he utter this exclamation aloud, and the echoes gave back his words with horrible distinctness, till the sound died away in laughing whispers among the arches, as though the fiends kept holiday to mock the anguish of mortal fear. Vainly did Hassan pray, and still more vainly weep—and wildly strain the oar again, to speed along the trackless aisle of the ocean cloister ; the same view

rose around, and all hope of escape seemed fruitless. Fiercely struggling, the yet uncrushed spirit of man contended with the prospect of death, and for many hours the patient Hassan kept his onward course, in the faint hope that he might even regain the spot from whence he had started. Why had he been in such haste to quit the shore? It seemed to him now, that even the pursuit of the infuriated Turks was less to be feared than the dreadful death he had so dearly purchased. And Melanthe, the child of his benefactor, the daughter of Ida, that angel in woman's form, who had tended him in sickness, and watched by his couch, speaking words of comfort to calm the terrors of his guilty soul—alas! must her child perish in his arms? Could he not save it from death—save it, if but to redeem, by the gratitude he felt for its parents, the treachery he had practised towards his sovereign? Poor Hassan! how did his heart bleed, as he gazed upon that child whom he had vowed to protect.

Hour after hour passed on:—with scarcely a hope to support him, he endeavoured to advance; but his strength was failing; the feeble stroke scarce

kept the slender bark from contact with the columns which seemed, as if by magic, to spring from the depth of the waters; and the heart of Hassan sickened, as his eye rested upon their ever multiplying forms. But now—is it that his straining gaze has lost its power?—the pillars grow less clear—the shadows dim—still, still more dim; and Hassan grasps the oar—on springs the boat—again the white arch gleams above his head—again the dark wave ripples as he flies, and then he pauses—oh! horror! how the light flickers and wanes! “The lamp—the lamp,” cried Hassan, with a shriek, stretching his hand towards it; and the glare of madness lights his eye, as the last gleam shoots up above the boat. Then all is dark—dark—silent as the tomb, save that the deep sob of bitter misery trembles through the chill and murky air, as, on the cheek of helpless infancy, the strong man’s head is pillowed now—to die!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE sufferings of the succeeding hours were dreadful ! More than once the sinking spirit of Hassan contemplated a speedy release, by a plunge into the dark gulf, upon whose bosom he lay helpless, while life ebbed slowly away. But the child he held within his arms !—could he leave it to die alone !—or take the life he once had saved ? The heart of Hassan would not harbour such a thought. And yet, how soon must death claim the fragile form he clasped so fondly ! The food he had brought with him was exhausted,—the cold had numbed the tender limbs, which Hassan vainly attempted to chafe ; and the cries of the terrified infant grew more and more feeble, as, appalled by the darkness, it clung to the breast of its protector !

Without a hope, and endeavouring to resign himself to the horrors of a lingering death, Hassan now laid himself down. So motionless was the

water, that he could feel that the column against which the boat had rested, still touched its side. How often, during those weary hours, did he raise his languid hand to touch the fluted stone, and sink again in despair, as he found himself moored as it were by a viewless power to the spot ! So still and changeless had been his position for many hours, that it was not without a feeling of increased horror, that he at length fancied he perceived a slight rocking motion in the boat. The superstition of Hassan was extreme, and now he trembled afresh, as many of the traditions of Greece, as well as those of his own land, crowded upon his overwrought fancy.

Without air, what could cause the sudden movement he had felt ? Was it some monster of the deep come, at the appointed time, to call him to the regions below the wave, where the Turks fancy all who perish on the sea, are summoned to receive their judgment ? or was it on the bosom of the stream which wafts the Grecian souls to realms of darkness, that he had sought refuge ?

The terror of Hassan rapidly increased ; but in another instant, even fear was merged in the stun-

ning sensation which overwhelmed him. A sound as of thunder rose in the distance ; and as it passed away, the waters trembled at its angry voice ; and the fragile boat rocked wildly to and fro. A deep silence followed, and Hassan could almost hear the beating of his heart, as he lay breathlessly watching for the return of that frightful sound. It came again, now no longer rumbling and distant, but nearer and nearer, until it seemed above, below, and filling every space around him, and then a sheet of flame, bursting from all sides, lit up the watery palace, and myriads of pillars seemed to dance before the wondering eyes of Hassan !

One second, and the light was gone ; it vanished with a crash, as though the angry heavens had dashed another world upon the earth ! and again and again it returned ; and out of the bosom of that waveless deep, arose a hissing sound, and Hassan saw that above his head the flames were bursting in every direction. Frantic with terror, he tried to wind his arms around the pillar near him, but the effort was vain. The trembling skiff was driven to and fro, and a thick smoke filled the air.

At last the sounds grew less frequent, and more

faint—the smoke gradually dispersed—and in a little while Hassan was weeping with joy—a soft light gleamed around. It was the light of heaven ; and through the cleft arches above his head, the bright blue sky smiled down, and life and liberty were in that smile. Strange and wild, among the echoes of that ocean palace, now sounded the words of thanksgiving which Hassan poured forth to God ; yet scarcely had he uttered them, when a new danger seemed about to snatch from him the hope he had just conceived. His boat, from some unseen impulse, began to glide rapidly over the water ; he seized the oar, and by strong efforts for some time avoided the contact of the pillars ; but soon the stream became so impetuous, that it bore him along with an overwhelming rapidity. Another moment, and the rushing sound of a cataract met his ear ; a blaze of sunlight followed ; and when he recovered from the suddenness of the shock, which had released him from his prison, he found himself still at the bottom of his boat, which was safely embedded in the ruins of the watery vault.

With as much of awe as of surprise, Hassan gazed upon the scene before him, and the mystery

of his late position was revealed. A magazine of powder had burst above the subterranean river, which seemed to him to wind beneath the city ; and from its crumbling arches the waters of this monstrous reservoir were now pouring into the valley below. One side was laid open to the day, and Hassan shuddered anew as he saw, through the shattered walls, the countless stems of the pillars in the labyrinth of which he had passed the night. A broken aqueduct at a short distance showed clearly the means by which the vaulted lake had been filled ; but Hassan had little time now to admire the grandeur of the device by which, in case of siege, the city could be supplied with water ; still less to think with reverence on the mighty mind which had planned and executed this wondrous scheme. The wishes of Hassan had only one object—to leave as quickly as might be the land where he had suffered so much. Without any great difficulty he contrived to extricate himself from the ruined walls where his boat was still secured ; and pressing Melanthe to his breast, as he knelt upon the green sward of the valley, he implored the blessing of Heaven and the Prophet ;

and having, as a good Mussulman, repeated sundry prayers, and the hundred and four attributes of Alláh, he felt his courage revive, and with confidence took his way to the shore, which was crowded with people. He there learned the proclamation, by which the Sultan permitted all the Greeks to remain in the City of Constantinople, or depart from it, according to their own desire. The latter alternative had been eagerly adopted by the greater number, and the waves of the Bosphorus gleamed with the white sails of the many vessels, the owners of which were busily employed in making their bargains for the transport of their countrymen to other shores.

Some were going to Italy—some to Spain ; and Hassan eagerly secured a passage in a small vessel bound for Naples: but before he would enter the sanctuary which would place him beyond the reach of the Sultan, at whose name he trembled, the grateful heart of Hassan prompted him to risk his own safety by pausing to make inquiries as to the fate of Ida and Elphenor. Of the latter he could gain no intelligence ; so many Greeks had already departed, that it was probable, as his death had not

been mentioned, that Elphenor was of the number ; but even among the scenes of horror which had been lately enacted, the inhuman murder of Ida by the hand of the Sultan was a fact of so much notoriety that Hassan could not doubt the words of the many, who, with expressions of detestation towards its perpetrator, related it to him.

It was too true ! Ida, the beautiful and the good, had perished beneath the blow of the disappointed tyrant ; and Hassan, as he remembered her kindness to himself, and the devoted love she bore to her child, forgot the passive sternness practised by those of his nation, and suffered his tears to fall upon the brow of the motherless babe he pressed to his bosom.

“ Would that I had died for her !” he murmured, as he looked upon the child of Ida ; “ but *Insh Alláh*, please God, thou shalt be saved ! Hassan is not ungrateful. Yes—*Insh Alláh*, thou shalt be saved ! Hassan will work for thee—he will take thee where no cruel Sultan can find thee ; and will be to thee a father. His sin is great, but his trials have been greater ; and he trusts in God ! *Lá ilhahi il Alláh !* There is no God but God !

and Mahomet is his Prophet!" and Hassan turned his face to the East, as he concluded his soliloquy, and stood for some moments in prayer, ere, with Melanthe, he entered the vessel which was to convey them to Italy.

END OF VOLUME I.

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OR,

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MELANTHE ;

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CHAPTER I.

THERE are days when every thing in Nature seems to wear a smile of peculiar brightness—when the air is more sweet, the song of the birds more glad, and even the murmur of the stream more gentle, as if hushed by the spirit of content and joy breathing from earth and heaven. Such hours, telling of the mighty influence of Nature, and Nature's God, speak directly to the heart. None can experience them, and yet remain unmoved; the soul lifts itself humbly to its Divine Creator; the happy are more grateful, and the sorrowful are soothed. But what are such hours of peace and brightness to him, whose breast is

torn by the fierceness of passion, by the galling sense of injury, or the base desire of revenge? They are hours of torture, more exquisite in their poignancy, than if the victim were writhing at the stake. The calm without but mocks the misery within; and each semblance of joy in Nature, strikes with a double pang upon the heart tainted by envy, or lacerated by remorse.

Bitter and keen were these thoughts, as they filled the dark mind of Luca Pitti, who, with his arms strongly drawn, rather than folded across his breast, stood upon the heights of Fiesole, and looked down upon the city of Florence. The delicious fragrance of the mountain air passed unheeded over his fevered brow; his eyes were strained, as if, amidst the white walls of the city of palaces which gleamed through the rich glow of sunset, he would have singled out some object; and it seemed as though he had succeeded, for a smile of bitterness lighted up his countenance, and a muttered imprecation burst from his lips, as he shook his clenched hand towards the magnificent woods which surrounded the villa of the Medici, near Fiesole.

The house was just visible from the spot where Luca Pitti stood; and he turned from the sight with a look of loathing, and advanced a few steps nearer to the brow of the hill; but, as if his very soul sickened at the gladness of the sunlight, he hastily drew his cap over his eyes, and strode down the road before him. He had not proceeded far, when there broke upon the air a sound which kindled anew the fury that raged within his breast; and, as though stung by some sudden impulse, he leaped from the path he was pursuing, and concealed himself in a thicket of evergreens, within a few paces of the road.

Throwing himself upon the ground, with his teeth set fast, and his eyes glaring like those of a fiend, he looked upon the gay multitude which swept past, while at every cry of "Viva! Viva!—Viva Lorenzo!—Viva Giuliano!—*Palle, Palle, Vivan' i Medici!" which rent the air, a groan of rage burst from his bosom.

The people were returning from a tournament, given by Lorenzo de' Medici, to commemorate the

* Palle, Palle! The armorial bearings of the house of Medici being three golden balls.

escape of his beloved father, Piero de' Medici, from an attempt at assassination, which had occurred a short time previously. Who had been the instigator of that attempt still remained a secret ; but the young Lorenzo, by his prudence and foresight, having averted the danger, disdained to bring to light the author of an outrage which all appeared unanimously to hold in abhorrence ; and resolving to be more upon his guard for the future, had dismissed the angry crowd who clamoured for revenge, saying mildly, " He knows not how to govern, who knows not how to forgive."

And he did forgive his enemies :—but there was one to whose breast forgiveness or gratitude were strangers ; and that one was Luca Pitti, who now, as he gazed through the leafy screen which concealed him, felt that he only hated still more bitterly the man who had so magnanimously pardoned him. How his heart swelled with rage, as he listened to the words of the happy citizens, who, enchanted with the amusement of the day, were loud in their praises of the magnificence by which the acts of their patrons were distinguished, but particularly those of the young Lorenzo, whose

liberality was unbounded. Each word was a dagger to the breast of the envious Luca Pitti ; and as the joyous crowd passed on, with the gay song and the merry laugh, he gnashed his teeth with rage.

The whole population of Florence had flocked to the tilting ground, and now the road from the villa was covered with a moving mass of light-hearted beings. For a few moments, the crowd was stationary ; and then a cry of joy, which rent the heavens, broke from the multitude, and the heart of Luca Pitti well nigh burst with fury, on beholding the object of his hatred within a few paces of the place of his concealment.

Lorenzo, and his young brother, Giuliano, were returning to the city, surrounded by a number of their friends, and superbly mounted and equipped. The two brothers slackened their pace as they perceived that the people stood to allow them to pass ; and doffing their plumed and jewelled caps, returned the greetings of their fellow citizens with a grace and kindness which went straight to every heart. “ Viva !, Viva ! Vivan’ i Medici ! ” — “ Viva Lorenzo, Viva il buon Piero ! ” burst from every side.

“E il bel Giuliano,” cried some women, as Giuliano, who was renowned for his beauty, passed close to them, and rewarded their admiration by a smile, which still further enhanced the superb expression of his countenance. And the gallant train moved on, the plumes of the riders waved in the distance, the cheers of the loving and delighted crowd grew more faint, and Luca Pitti found himself alone—maddened by the secret consciousness of baffled treachery, and burning for revenge!

CHAPTER II.

THE power and popularity of the Medici had long been a subject of jealousy to many of the most important families of Florence. More than one attempt had been made, in order to free the city from the domination of Cosmo de' Medici; yet notwithstanding that he had suffered banishment, from the jealousy of his fellow citizens, the talents and virtues of this great man so far prevailed over the factious envy of the Florentine nobles, that he was restored to the post he had so worthily filled, and at his death transmitted the government of the republic of Florence to his son, Piero.

It might have been supposed that gratitude towards the memory of one, who had, by his wise and virtuous administration, placed their city at the head of the Italian republics, would have prompted the zeal of the Florentines towards a more generous support of the family to which they

owed so much; but the littleness of the mind of man has from time immemorial interposed between him and the furtherance of his best interests. Instead of a cordial support and co-operation with Piero, many of the nobles secretly united against him, and endeavoured to undermine his authority.

One of the great sources of the power of the Medici was their enormous wealth. Cosmo, fully aware of this advantage, had lost no opportunity of improving it. He was the richest citizen in the world; and not only did he engage in commercial transactions to an extent almost incredible, but he also contrived, by large and well arranged loans, to propitiate most of the reigning sovereigns of Europe. But it was not only at a distance that Cosmo had employed his riches—most of the chief families in Florence were indebted to him for sums which they imagined would never be required of them; and it was not until the death of Cosmo they were reminded that what they had hitherto considered a gift, was in reality merely a loan.

Prompted by the treacherous advice of a false friend, Dietisalvo Neroni, Piero de' Medici had no sooner succeeded to the government of Florence,

than he announced his intention of calling in the various sums which had been lent by his father, giving as a reason that his commercial relations were upon too extended a scale. Although no one could arraign the justice of this act, it was immediately productive of the pernicious effects which the insidious Neromi had anticipated. The Florentine nobles found it very inconvenient to repay what they had borrowed; and although they did not dare openly to proclaim their dissatisfaction, a spirit of rebellion spread darkly amongst them, and a whisper arose as to why one family of citizens should thus elevate themselves above the rest, and rule with sovereign sway in a city where all ought to be equals? The question might have been easily answered—because to the family whose grandeur had become a subject of the meanest envy, was the city of Florence indebted for the high place she now enjoyed in the estimation of other states.

Commerce, arts, and literature—the refinements of luxury, the spirit of chivalry, and the noble feeling of self-sacrifice to the public welfare—all had

sprung into life at the bidding of the Medici ; all that had slumbered during the darkness of past ages, awoke at the generous call of those Citizen Princes, whose country was their glory and their pride, and whose name, while the world endures, will be the glory and the pride of their country.

Although there were not wanting many who could fully appreciate the merits of the Medici, still a formidable body of malcontents existed in the city, chiefly amongst those whose elevated situation rendered them aspirants to the power they longed to wrest from the hands which grasped it. The secret conferences of the disaffected had been many and deep, although hitherto unavailing, for the power of Cosmo had been too firmly fixed, being based upon the confidence and affection of the people : but as soon as Piero, by the unwise act of calling in his debts, had excited the murmurs of many who had formerly been most loud in their declarations of friendship, the hopes of the conspirators began to rise, and a more definitive plan of operation than had hitherto been attempted, was agreed upon—this was, the assassination of the

unsuspecting Piero, whilst yet his sons Lorenzo and Giuliano were too young to undertake the cares of government.

All was arranged with apparent promise of success. The bad health of Piero offered peculiar advantages for the execution of their treacherous designs; for, being unable to mount his horse, he was generally carried in a chair by his servants. After due deliberation they fixed upon the moment when, returning from his country seat, Piero should enter the city from the northern side. As the time approached, the soldiers of the Marquis de Ferrara, who had been stationed in the neighbourhood, by the orders of the conspirators, advanced so as to hem in the whole party, when the life of the destined victim was providentially preserved by the very person whose tender years had been deemed a security for his non-interference.

The young Lorenzo, ever watchful of a parent he adored, had ridden forward in advance of the scanty train which accompanied his father; and meeting some soldiers whom he knew to belong to a foreign state, his acute mind instantly penetrated

the device with which they endeavoured to lull him into security. Feigning to enter into conversation with them, he carelessly informed them that his father was following at a short distance ; and at the same time contrived to detach one of his followers who, unperceived by the soldiers, dived into the forest by the way side, and hastening to Piero, led him in safety by another and more circuitous path to the city ; while Lorenzo, without exhibiting the smallest sign of fear, passed unmolested through the hostile troops, nor paused, nor spoke, until he stood by the side of his father in the Council hall, surrounded by the officers and magistrates, whom he had hastily summoned.

Then, with an undaunted air, did he proclaim the treason which had been meditated, and slowly glancing round the assembly, inquired what should be the fate of those whose treacherous hearts had instigated such an attempt ? With one voice a sentence of immediate death was pronounced ; and such was the terror which the firmness of Lorenzo inspired, that many of the conspirators threw themselves on their knees before the heroic youth,

whose presence of mind had saved the life of his parent, and, confessing their treacherous intention, implored for mercy.

It was then that the gentle and generous nature of Lorenzo suggested the answer, which fell like a double condemnation upon the hearts of the still concealed traitors. It was then that the dark and narrow soul of Luca Pitti first burned with a personal hatred towards the noble youth before whom he stood, and that he conceived the project of a still deeper vengeance; for at the very moment that his fawning tongue proclaimed his grief for the danger of his friend, and abhorrence of the meditated crime, the calm eye of the young Lorenzo had read him to the heart, and the conscious traitor felt that, though pardoned, he was discovered, and despised.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Luca Pitti, recovering from the abstraction into which the reflections consequent upon the appearance of the Medici, returning as it were in triumph from the tournament, had led him, again bent his steps towards the city of Florence, the moon shed her calm light upon all around. The sky was cloudless, and the stillness of the air, only broken by the gay songs of the happy people, who yet lingered in the open streets, and by the side of the Arno, unwilling to close a day, which had been to them one of unbounded joy and excitement. With slow and measured steps, Luca Pitti continued to advance, his head almost bowed upon his breast, and apparently insensible to all around; yet not a sound, not a word escaped him; while at every demonstration of joy which reached him, he gnashed his teeth in bitterness of spirit; for the acclamations which proclaimed the triumph of his rivals

over their enemies, were as if his own condemnation had been uttered by the whole people. His coward heart sunk within him, when he remembered the signal contempt with which public execration had been implied, rather than expressed, towards him, upon the rumour, that he had been one of the secret conspirators, whom the generosity of Lorenzo had pardoned. The recollection now seemed to lend wings to his steps, and he hurried forward until, having reached a temporary door in an angle of an unfinished building, he drew forth a key, and in a moment afterwards stood within the walls of a palace of such magnificent proportions, that it appeared better fitted for the abode of a mighty sovereign, than the dwelling of a simple citizen.

Now secure from intrusion, the baffled and degraded traitor gave himself up to all the bitterness of rage and despair, as he contemplated the ruin and disappointment which was the immediate consequence of his crime. It is difficult to imagine that the glorious sentiment of a noble ambition can ever give birth to the black design of treachery; but even ambition, and the pride of distinction, when carried to excess, become criminal.

This was exemplified in the character and conduct of Luca Pitti. Equal in birth to the Medici, his first impulse had been to gain, as they had done, the estimation of his fellow citizens, by a laudable endeavour to promote the welfare and splendour of their republic; until yielding, by degrees, to the intoxication of public approval, and the accession of weight and consequence which followed, he began to entertain views of a less honourable nature, nursing in secret the hope of being one day still more highly distinguished, than even the family which he had endeavoured to emulate.

At length, so firmly did the idea of his own importance fix itself in his mind, that all demonstration of public approval bestowed upon others was distorted into an intended insult to himself.

His feelings towards the family of the Medici in particular, assumed the character of a settled and implacable hatred. Far from any open declaration of hostility, he continued for some time apparently on the best terms with them; and having begun to carry into effect his plan of erecting a palace so superb, that every other building would shrink into insignificance beside it, he did not hesitate to avail

himself of the generosity for which the Medici were so distinguished, and gladly accepted their offers of assistance towards the completion of his magnificent design, his own fortune, although considerable, being found inadequate to defray the expenses of so great an undertaking.

The very marbles, of which the walls were composed, were brought with infinite care and expense from the quarries of the Medici; and when the building began to rise in its splendour, and the grandeur of its proportions filled the mind with visions of its future glory, the spirit of generosity so laudably awakened by the noble acts of Cosmo, and his son Piero de' Medici, seemed as it were with one common thrill to pervade every Florentine bosom.

The completion of the Palace of Luca Pitti became a point of national honour, each citizen vying with the other as to who should contribute most largely towards it. It may appear almost incredible that the undertaking of a private individual should be thus honoured by public interest; but in an age when the encouragement of the arts and the revival of literature were the avowed objects

of the pride of nations ;—when the sovereign*, to whom all the South of Europe looked up as to a model, chose for his armorial bearings an open book and a sculptor's chisel ; when the same sovereign, after the disastrous treaty of Lodi, refrained from further act of hostility, upon receiving from Cosmo de' Medici a finely copied manuscript of Livy ;—it is scarcely surprising, that a state like the Florentine, which had been called by the refined taste and talent of a family of its citizens from the comparative obscurity into which, with the rest of Italy, it had fallen, should hold in high estimation the followers of that newly awakened spirit to which they already owed so much.

The more freedom in a people, the more each citizen is interested in any great undertaking which may contribute to the honour of his country, and the more firmly the hereditary glory that attaches to public virtue or exploits is perpetuated. The subject of a tyrant, only sees in a successful general, an actor who has played the first part in a brilliant spectacle ; but the free citizen beholds in

* Alphonzo, King of Naples, surnamed the Magnanimous.

him his defender, his saviour, and the author of his own glory. The feeling of sympathy and admiration fires every breast, and a name rendered illustrious by a noble action, becomes, in a free people, a national property.

Imbued as were the Florentines with this spirit, the grandeur which marked the conception of Luca Pitti in the design of his palace, at once captivated their imagination. Each citizen appeared to feel that his own honour was at stake; and when it was ascertained that even the large fortune of Luca Pitti must be totally insufficient to carry out the scheme of magnificence which his fancy had traced, every heart was opened, every hand was raised to help him to the completion of his great undertaking. From all sides presents of immense value poured in; the citizens declared that their treasures were better deposited in what they termed a monument of the greatness of their nation, than in their own dwellings; and as soon as the state of the building permitted, Luca Pitti beheld, as if by magic, his walls hung with rare paintings, his galleries lined with statues, and his rooms filled with the richest and most beautiful furniture.

Instead of the pure feeling of gratitude, which should have filled his heart, upon such a demonstration of public and private favour, the aspiring soul of Luca Pitti urged him to climb still higher. The fruit of these ambitious sentiments had been the plot against the life of Piero, so signally defeated by the prudence and ability of his son Lorenzo. The result of the conspiracy had shown to Luca Pitti how futile had been the hope in which he had indulged; but he was unprepared for the galling and signal vengeance which was inflicted by his fellow citizens upon the miscreant who, in betraying his former friend, had, they felt, been equally perfidious towards themselves.

Although the treachery of Luca Pitti had been as it were suppressed by the magnanimity of the Medici, yet he stood among the people a marked man. Eager to show their detestation of his crime, but a few hours after its discovery had elapsed, when crowds of workmen were seen hurrying to and from his palace, bearing with them, to the houses of their respective owners, the several precious gifts they had a little while before solicited him to accept. Some few endeavoured to conceal

their real meaning, by a pretence of wishing to borrow the things for a short time ; others, by appearing to have only considered them as a loan ; but the bulk of the citizens boldly demanded their property. The word traitor was openly pronounced ; and Luca Pitti—the conscious traitor, the accused, the denounced — shrunk from the contemptuous look his guilty heart traced upon every face ; and, like a wounded tiger, unable to spring upon his foe, lay writhing in impotent fury, neglected and alone.

Now, as he stood within the walls of his palace, the reality of his situation struck with redoubled force upon his mind. The bright moonlight streamed in at the windows, and as he walked through the rooms, the magnificence of which had been the theme of every tongue, and which he hoped would have transmitted his name with honour and renown to succeeding generations, he gnashed his teeth with rage. From every side the contempt of his fellow citizens seemed to pour upon him afresh—for each spot was connected in his mind with some kind word, or generous act, which had hallowed his undertaking. Where, now,

were all the treasures which a noble heart would have twice valued, as a tribute to worth from the hand of friendship? Gone—all gone;—snatched hurriedly from beneath his roof, as though contamination lurked within the walls: and Luca Pitti, stung to the soul by this bitter proof of the utter contempt in which he was held, hurried on through the empty chambers, until he reached the foot of the grand staircase.

There he suddenly paused. Was it possible that there still existed hearts too generous to smite a fallen foe? The conviction struck deeply on the goaded spirit of him against whom all mankind appeared to have made a common league; and Luca Pitti, the stern—the hard-hearted, and the treacherous, struggled for a moment against this one feeling of human softness, then leaned his head upon the balustrade—and wept. Recovering himself, he looked again. It was as he had at first perceived. There, in the same places which they had occupied during the short period of his grandeur, stood the priceless antique statues—the gift of the Medici. Of all the treasures which had been lavished upon him, these alone now remained

to Luca Pitti. Although of inestimable value, these alone had not been reclaimed ; and the hearts from which he would have drawn the life blood, were the only ones which had softened towards him in his disgrace. For a moment, the evil passions of the traitor were lulled, and he glanced rapidly back to former days, when the ties of friendship had bound him to those who were now the objects of his hatred.

He thought of the noble Cosmo—of Piero, and his gallant and accomplished sons ; he looked upon their gifts—gifts made in the full confidence of mutual faith and affection ; and he fancied that the sculptured brows gleamed sadly upon him, through the dim light which filled the hall. But then again, as he gazed around, and beheld, in the devastation of his palace, the ruin of his hopes, his evil passions once more took the ascendant. He raised himself from the drooping posture he had assumed—threw back his head as if to gain courage for some step that he meditated, when suddenly the midnight chime from the neighbouring convent struck his ear. His breath came short and quick ;—he grasped the balustrade with a

trembling hand, and, as the strokes fell one by one upon the solemn stillness of the night, it seemed as though the sound had frozen him to stone. The bell ceased, and Luca Pitti breathed again. That sound appeared to have wrought some sudden change within him. He looked stealthily round, as if in fear of discovery—advanced a few steps—then paused, and listened; a fiendish laugh from his lips told how keenly he felt that the Pitti palace now numbered no other being within its walls; and hurriedly advancing to a door before him, he threw it open. The shadow which fell upon the marble floor, showed that a human form stood in the entrance, but the face of the stranger was muffled in his cloak.

“Montesecco?” said Luca Pitti, inquiringly.

“I am here,” replied a low voice.

“Follow me,” said Luca Pitti, hurriedly; and taking the hand of the stranger, as though to draw him across the threshold, he secured the door by which they had entered, and, without speaking, led the way to a more remote chamber in the palace.

CHAPTER IV.

THE room to which Luca Pitti conducted his guest appeared to have been lately inhabited : some logs of wood were burning on the hearth ; and lighting a lamp, the owner of the apartment placed it on a table, upon which several cups and wine flagons still remained. Filling a large goblet, Luca Pitti hastily swallowed the contents, and by a gesture invited his companion to do the same ; but Montesecco, declining the offer, seated himself by the table, fixed his eyes upon the agitated countenance of his host, and appeared determined to await in silence the communication which the summons he had received entitled him to expect. The demon of irresolution seemed, however, to have suddenly seized upon one whose character had formerly been most decided. The nervous agitation of Luca Pitti increased every moment ; and as Montesecco continued to rivet his gaze upon him, exhibited

itself painfully, in the downcast look, which seemed to shun the eyes which he felt would read him to the soul.

The noble form and face of the young man, before whom one more than twice his age now quailed, were of that high and intellectual character which bespoke a nature equally difficult to deceive, as to persuade into any measure verging upon dishonour. The singular beauty of the features upon which Luca Pitti more than once cast a furtive glance ere he dared to speak, was the least attraction of Montesecco. Firmness and nobility of mind were in every line, while the softness of his fine dark eyes, and the gentle smile, which subdued the haughty curve of his short upper lip, gave a touching expression of melancholy to a countenance which seemed to belong to one who ought not to have suffered. That he had both felt and suffered, was apparent to any who could have followed the rapid changes of his face. For some minutes Luca Pitti had gazed upon it in silence, till at length he hurriedly spoke.

“Where did my messenger reach you?” were his first words.

“ At Rome,” replied Montesecco.

“ Ah ! it is then as I heard,” exclaimed Luca Pitti.

“ You have taken service with his Holiness the Pope ? ”

“ I have,” replied Montesecco ; “ for three years I have bound myself to serve, as may seem most fitting for the interest of the Holy See. But,” he exclaimed more eagerly, “ was it for this you summoned me in such haste ? ”

“ For what did you suppose I required your presence ? ” asked his companion calmly, as he fixed a searching look upon the anxious countenance of Montesecco.

“ I know not,” replied the latter ; “ yet I had hoped you were about to fulfil the promise - - . ”

“ Nay, my son,” interposed Luca Pitti, “ matters of more weight - - - ”

“ There are none of more weight,” interrupted the young man, “ none at least to me. You promised to reveal all. You promised, that if I would be patient until this year, you would tell me the secret of my birth—you would give me a name—a country—a home ! Think what it is to wander desolate on

may grasp and say, "I have a right
hearth by which, in the hour of sor-
row, I stand, and feel that you have a right
to my love and its love. Think of this, and pity
will plead in my behalf."

Luca Pitti looked upon the image
of the speaker, and smiled. The
simplicity of his manner convinced him that the
Montesecco was sincere, and through
how much might there not be gained

"We will talk of this hereafter,"
said he, "for the present, I have other views; be-

"Patient!" cried Montesecco with
impatience. "Saints for patience, but ask it not for
human; a man, wronged, betrayed,
by the beguiling art with which you
have lulled me on for years to hope; and now, once

young man buried his face in his hands, "you have been to me as a son—say, have I not fulfilled a father's part towards you? Yes," he continued, taking the hand which Montesecco extended towards him at these words, "your wish has been a law to me. It was by your own choice that the fortune I destined for you was spent in the equipment of troops; the life of a Condottiere was your own choice, and by it you have been enabled to distinguish yourself as few of your years have ever had an opportunity of doing. Whose name stands higher for deeds of fame than that of Giovanni Montesecco? And where is the sovereign, who would not gladly purchase, at any price, the service of your gallant band? Do you not perceive the position this renown may entitle you to occupy? The fate of cities—of provinces—nay, of kingdoms may be at your control; and," added the tempter, as he saw that the excitement of his hearer was gradually giving way to a profound attention, "why should not a kingdom be its price, and its reward?"

"How?" said Montesecco, "a kingdom?"

"It is but a word," replied Luca Pitti, care

the earth ; to feel that, among the countless multitudes that people it, there is not one being with whom you may claim kindred—one hand that you may grasp and say, ‘ this is of my blood ’—one hearth by which, in the hour of sorrow, you may stand, and feel that you have a right to its shelter and its love. Think of this, and pity, if not justice, will plead in my behalf.”

Luca Pitti looked upon the impassioned face of the speaker, and smiled. The earnestness of his manner convinced him that the anxiety of Montesecco was sincere, and through that anxiety how much might there not be gained ?

“ We will talk of this hereafter,” he said ; “ for the present, I have other views ; be patient.”

“ Patient !” cried Montesecco wildly. “ Ask the Saints for patience, but ask it not from me. I am but human ; a man, wronged, betrayed, and tempted by the beguiling art with which you have led me on for years to hope ; and now, once more, my hope is wrecked, and you ask me to be patient—ay—patient like the fawning spaniel, patient beneath a grief that stings to madness.”

“ Montesecco,” said Luca Pitti calmly, as the

young man buried his face in his hands, "you have been to me as a son—say, have I not fulfilled a father's part towards you? Yes," he continued, taking the hand which Montesecco extended towards him at these words, "your wish has been a law to me. It was by your own choice that the fortune I destined for you was spent in the equipment of troops; the life of a Condottiere was your own choice, and by it you have been enabled to distinguish yourself as few of your years have ever had an opportunity of doing. Whose name stands higher for deeds of fame than that of Giovanni Montesecco? And where is the sovereign, who would not gladly purchase, at any price, the service of your gallant band? Do you not perceive the position this renown may entitle you to occupy? The fate of cities—of provinces—nay, of kingdoms may be at your control; and," added the tempter, as he saw that the excitement of his hearer was gradually giving way to a profound attention, "why should not a kingdom be its price, and its reward?"

"How?" said Montesecco, "a kingdom?"

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life—but remember, the honour of Montesecco is his all ;” and as the recollection of his desolate position rushed to his mind, the young soldier bent his head, to conceal the trembling tear beneath the long silken lashes that shaded his cheek.

The spirit and integrity which the bearing of Montesecco displayed had little effect upon the heart of his tempter ; but the deep emotion which he laboured to conceal from the eye of Luca Pitti convinced the latter that his victim was still in his power. Unwilling, by further irritation, to lose an advantage he felt he possessed, he hastened to change the conversation, by inquiring what news the Condottiere had brought from Rome.

“ There was not much when I left it. The jubilee still continues ; and the popularity of the new Pope increases.”

“ You know,” said Luca Pitti, inquiringly, “ that Lorenzo de’ Medici has been chosen to bear the greetings of the Florentines to His Holiness upon his accession ?”

“ I had heard it whispered,” replied Montesecco ; “ but such is the terror which the memory of

Paul II. has left in the minds of the Roman people, that few dare to canvass openly any measure relating to his Holiness. The prisons of Rome yet groan with the crowds of men of science and learning, with whom, under pretence of being dangerous to the state, Paul had filled them."

"And my old friend, Roderigo Borgia, how does he bear himself towards the new Pontiff? The Papal crown would have better graced the proud brow of the Borgia," said Luca Pitti.

"His Eminence is of the same opinion," replied Montesecco, smiling; "he but bides his time—meanwhile his state overshadows all; he alone, of the Cardinals, has availed himself of the permission of Paul II. to wear in public the tiara and purple robe; and when he rides forth, I would you could behold the blaze of jewels he displays, while the scarlet housings of his horse sweep the ground; and he waves his hand to the people more with the air of a conquerer in triumph, than an humble follower of the church."

"Ha! well do I recognise the pride of the Borgia in this. None ever failed who played so bold a game.

He will be Pope one day—and then—but,” said Luca Pitti, interrupting himself, as though afraid to trust his hearer too far, “what of the crusade?”

“It is yet undecided,” said Montesecco, sadly; “would that it were once determined. Italy will see the fierce Mahomet sweep her fairest provinces from her bosom, ere she will hush her petty griefs, and unite against the common enemy; every month brings news of fresh inroads upon her power—would that I had the means - - -”

“Which you have not,” broke in Luca Pitti, sharply. “Leave Rome to settle her disputes with the Sultan. It is now many years since she calmly saw Constantinople destroyed, and with its fall ended all her sympathy with her Eastern brethren. Since then what have been the crusades? a mere mummary. No, my dear Montesecco, think not of the crusade—we have matters of importance nearer home. And now, when do you propose returning to Rome?”

“This very hour,” replied the young man; “I little thought, when I hurried hither on your summons, it was only to hear a proposal of ——”

“Of what?” said Luca Pitti, anxiously, as Montesecco hesitated to conclude the sentence he had begun.

“*Of murder,*” was the reply, uttered in a solemn tone.

“No, no—not of murder! surely, you mistook my meaning—it was but on public grounds that I suggested - - -; but we will speak no more of it. To-night, you say, you leave Florence.”

“My horses wait without the gates—we part this very hour,” said Montesecco, with a bitterness which did not escape his companion.

“We part, though not for long. I, too, must journey towards Rome. But first, let me give you what you must deliver with your own hands—these letters to the Pope; this to the Cardinal Borgia; and now farewell. The dawn is breaking, it were well you were not seen in Florence.”

“And this is all?” said Montesecco, as he marked the haste with which his companion would have dismissed him, while a lingering hope still remained in his own bosom that some allusion to his history might have marked their conference.

“All!” replied Luca Pitti, sternly.

“ Then farewell,” said the young soldier, sadly, as he folded his cloak round him.

“ For the present,” answered Luca Pitti. “ We shall meet at Rome.”

CHAPTER V.

BITTER were the feelings of Montesecco as he pursued his solitary journey towards Rome. He had quitted it full of hope, and he returned with a feeling of degradation; for it was degradation, to a mind like his, to have listened, even unwillingly, to a proposal of a dishonourable nature. Disappointed in the hope which had filled his breast on receiving the summons of one whom he had hitherto obeyed as a parent, the ideas of Montesecco became clouded and melancholy, from the sudden revulsion of feeling. He exaggerated to himself the discomforts of his position, and called to mind a variety of imaginary slights he had received. He even considered whether it would not be advisable, since Luca Pitti persevered in the obstinate silence he had so long preserved with regard to the birth and parentage of one

whom he had cherished from infancy, to relieve him entirely from a charge which he must now consider irksome, and by obtaining a dismissal from the Pope, remain free to follow a profession of arms in some distant land, and there to seek a country and a home.

By degrees, however, these feelings of sorrow and disappointment gave way to a lighter mood. A new life opened before him. What might not the next three years produce in his favour? For that period he had placed himself and his adherents at the disposal of the Pope. This was a mode of obtaining military employment sanctioned by the custom of the day. The constant warfare in which Italy and the South of Europe was engaged, was usually carried on through the means of the Condottieri, sometimes men of rank and station, though occasionally adventurers ambitious of renown, who hired themselves and their troops to the various petty states. It was considered highly dishonourable, while the period of such an engagement remained unexpired, either to slacken in zeal for the service of the state upon which the Condottiere and his troops depended, or to attempt to abridge

the period of that service without sufficient justification.

In making an engagement with the Pope, Montesecco had been chiefly influenced by the expectation of a crusade against the Turks, in which he might have added fresh laurels to those he had already won ; but in this hope he was destined to be disappointed. The subject of a crusade was one which at Rome was constantly revived, and as constantly abandoned ; and since the signal failure of the gallant attempt of Pius II., who, having organized every thing for a sacred war, quitted Rome with all the pomp of military and religious zeal, no further attempt at curbing the insolence of Mahomet had been made.

From the period of the fall of Constantinople, the Sultan had gradually advanced towards Italy, and now threatened several of the nearest provinces with the fate which had befallen the unhappy Greeks. Nothing showed the tameness of spirit of the Italian princes more than the apathy with which they regarded the progress of the Turks ; but Italy, divided by petty tyrants, was no longer a nation. Her princes had lost their pride,—her

magistrates their power,—her warriors their courage, and her citizens their patriotism ; and yielding to the growing spirit of luxury, and the gratification of revenge for the petty insults of their nearest neighbours, the Italian states wasted the strength which, if combined, might still have placed them at the head of nations, and calmly looked on while the galleys of the Sultan swept their shores.

In a few years, Italy had lost most of her colonies in the isles of Greece. She allowed the conquest of the shores of Dalmatia, Epirus, and Peleponnesus, which, in the hands of the Christians, secured the empire of the Adriatic ; but, in those of the Turks, exposed Italy to the invasions of a people hating her laws, religion, and manners.

It was this position of affairs which, a few years before the appearance of Montesecco as a candidate for military renown, had urged the high-spirited Pius II. to undertake a crusade. He quitted Rome with a train of unequalled splendour, followed by ten cardinals, sixty bishops, and a crowd of princes and ambassadors. For a time the enthusiasm of the country was roused. All the states through which he passed vied with each

other in doing him honour. Perugia received him as a king ! Sienna recalled all her banished nobility at his request ; and at Florence his litter was borne by the principal nobles, who gave fêtes of a most magnificent description during his stay in their city. But all was of no avail. Ere the Pope could reach Ancona, his plans were frustrated by the internal dissensions which had arisen in his army ; a great portion of his troops deserted by the way ; and Pius, perceiving that all prospect of success against the Infidels was lost, and trembling for the sovereignty of Rome, resolved to employ the remainder of his force in quelling the disturbances at home, and in assisting Ferdinand of Naples in his endeavours to keep the French and the house of Anjou at a distance.

Thus ended the only real attempt at a crusade ; and though the reigning Pope still held out a hope, and had even commanded a jubilee to be celebrated, in order to secure funds for the enterprise, yet the eagerness with which Montesecco had bound himself to the service of the Pontiff, only tended to make the disappointment more keen, when he perceived that no real intention of the kind existed

on the part of his new master. The sanguine spirit of the young Coudottiere constantly exposed him to similar mortifications. Ever ready to imagine that whatever he most desired, was about to be realized, the constant revulsion of feeling which he was doomed to experience had begun to act upon his character, producing a morbid sensation of distrust, foreign to the fearless and chivalrous frankness of his nature. The recent conduct of Luca Pitti had not tended to diminish this impression, and it needed all the support of the vigorous intellect with which Montesecco had been endowed, to overcome the dejection which the disappointment of his dearest hopes had occasioned.

During the first days of his journey he had suffered keenly ; but as he drew near to Rome, and remembered the gallant troop whose perils and glory he had so often shared, he felt that he was not desolate upon the earth, and his spirits rose on his approach to the city, in which, as the dependants of the Pope, his soldiers were now quartered.

The scene also became more enlivening. The jubilee had attracted from various parts of Italy, pilgrims of every age and calling, hastening to con-

tribute their mite to the exigencies of the Holy See, and the defence of their country and religion ; for such were the grounds upon which this tax was levied ; while the promise of an indulgence to all who should personally deposit their offerings at Rome, in the coffers of the Medici, who were then the bankers of the Pope, induced many thousands to make the journey, rather than forego the advantage held out to them.

As Montesecco approached the termination of his journey, he was not surprised to find the roads crowded with travellers. Most of them were of the middle and lower class ; but amongst the more prominent of the wayfarers with whom he had interchanged courtesies, was one who had irresistibly attracted his attention. This was a man between sixty and seventy years of age, at least if years could be calculated by the extreme whiteness of his hair, and a beard which fell nearly to his waist. His figure was tall and erect ; but, as the folds of the large cloak in which he was enveloped sometimes waved aside, Montesecco was much amused by perceiving that the stirrups of the stranger were so shortened as to bring his feet almost

into the position which should have been occupied by his knees.

Montesecco, who was accounted the best horseman of his day, could scarcely reconcile this eastern mode of riding with the simple habit of the Italian citizen, which the rest of the stranger's dress denoted ; but the superiority of the steed upon which he was mounted, as well as the whole of his equipment, and that of his companion, convinced the young Condottiere that he who rode by his side was as thoroughly versed in the requisite qualities of a horse, as expert in the management of the animal.

Having fully satisfied himself upon this point, Montesecco turned his attention to the only follower of the mysterious traveller, who for two days had ridden in his company without interchanging more than a slight inclination of the head with any of those whose journey compelled them to keep the same road. Nothing could afford a greater contrast than did the stranger to his only companion, who was a young and lively Greek boy, dressed out in all the picturesque finery of his nation, and in the wildest ecstasy of delight at every occurrence which marked the progress of the party.

Mounted upon a small and fiery horse, the boy never ceased urging the animal to prance about in every direction. Sometimes he would gallop on a-head, returning at the same pace, merely to have the mischievous pleasure of scattering to the right and left several devout pilgrims, who appeared somewhat unused to riding ; at others, he would dive into the thickets which skirted the road, and suddenly re-appear in a direction where he was least expected, laughing with childish glee at the surprise his abrupt movements excited, and ever and anon riding close to the old man, and casting a wistful look towards his grave countenance.

Montesecco remarked that the features of the traveller occasionally relaxed almost to a smile, and assumed an expression of melancholy tenderness, as he gazed upon the glowing face of the young Greek, and witnessed his gambols among the sedate pilgrims with whom chance had brought him in contact ; but, to the surprise of the Condottiere, he never heard either address the other. There was evidently kindness, attention, and even love on both sides, but words were wanting. In silence they had joined the party, and in silence they con-

till, at length, so forcible was the
it created, that to separate from
travellers became impossible.

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the terror of the old man, darted to

the boy extorted from his companion ; and thus it continued ; and whether on the lonely road, or the crowded inn, at which the travellers were obliged to share in common the few comforts it afforded, these two, differing so widely in all other respects, passed on in unbroken silence, until Montesecco persuaded himself that they were, doubtless, bound by a holy vow, or condemned to penance for some fearful sin.

The strong sense of the Condottiere could not altogether preserve him free from the gross superstition which, in that age, too often took the place of religion ; and such was the excitement which the constant scrutiny of the actions of the travellers had caused in his mind, that he at last ceased to regard them as Pilgrims, and believing them under the ban of the Holy Church, resolved to hold no further communication with them.

In this resolution, however, he was doomed to disappointment. His horse had on the previous day met with a slight accident ; but from continued travelling, the lameness, which had at first been trifling, increased so materially, that he determined, instead of endeavouring to reach the city that night,

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individual, an old man, whose appearance denoted extreme poverty, and who gladly accepted the offer with which Montesecco accompanied the demand for a night's lodging. A small shed at the back of the house was shown him as a stable; and having, early in the morning, sent forward to the city the men who had served him as an escort, Montesecco now fulfilled towards his favourite horse all those cares and duties which every soldier knows how to perform. This done, he returned to the house, when, to his vexation, he found that he was not to be the only guest. There, in the spot where he had left him, sat the old man to whom the cottage belonged, and by his side, and with the same imperturbable expression of gravity depicted on his countenance, Montesecco beheld his fellow-traveller, the stranger with the white beard; while the Greek boy stood at a little distance patting the horses, and peering round with his bright black eyes, as if in hopes of discovering some new mode of amusement.

Montesecco, uttering a hasty imprecation, resolved immediately to proceed towards Roune. His curiosity respecting the strangers, was rapidly

changing to aversion ; and irritated at the idea of passing the night by compulsion in their company, he returned to the stable. Here his better feelings prevailed. His gallant but way-worn steed was unfit for farther travel, and as he marked the weary limbs of the noble animal, Montesecco experienced a sensation of self contempt as he dwelt upon the puerile suspicions which he had allowed to creep into his breast. With an effort at overcoming the absurd prejudice he had conceived against his fellow-travellers, he bent his steps towards the house, but finding that it boasted only of one room, in which they had already installed themselves, he declined disturbing them ; and intending to pursue his journey with the first dawn, he once more turned to the stable, and without taking off the light armour which he wore, threw himself upon the straw with which one end of the hut was filled, and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

How long the slumbers of Montesecco lasted was unknown, even to himself. Tired with his long journey, he slept soundly at first, until disturbed by a disagreeable sensation, which, without awakening him, destroyed the comfort of his repose. Oppressed as if by a painful dream, he lay uneasily on his couch of straw, but again and again the same sensation returned, and he moved restlessly from side to side, as though striving with some unseen power. Still he did not awake, until at length, yielding as it were to a sudden and irresistible impulse, he started from his sleep, and raising himself upon his couch, gazed around him. And there, in the dim moonlight, ere his senses had found their tone, his excited imagination painted innumerable phantoms; but all bore the same form—the form of his mysterious fellow-travellers. In every glimmer of the moon's pale light through the

crevices of the shed, he fancied that he saw the old man with his long white beard, first horribly distinct, then fading away to a shadow, and now re-appearing in a form of such magnitude that it seemed to fill up the whole room.

Montesecco turned away, but only to meet the shining eyes of the Greek boy, which appeared to flash upon him with superhuman brightness from every corner. And the brave Condottiere, who would with unshrinking courage have met death upon the field, shuddered as the phantoms of his own imagination flitted before him. But it is not a phantom, or if so, it is one of flesh and blood, that now creeps to the side of the soldier. A movement almost habitual caused Montesecco to grasp his sword as he distinctly felt the pressure of a hand upon his breast. With a sudden start he rose to his feet, and there, in the fitful light, gleamed upwards to his own the same bright eyes which had haunted him while he slept.

It was not then a dream—the Greek boy was kneeling at his feet, and Montesecco, as he bent towards him, perceived that he was in tears. Yielding to the mute entreaty which seemed to urge him to

follow, he allowed the boy to lead him from the hut ; but not seeing any object outside that justified his suspicions of danger, he hesitated to advance. Still his companion seemed unsatisfied, and with tears and sobs made signs to him to follow.

“ What would you have of me ?” said Montesecco.
“ Speak, and I will obey.”

The answer of the Greek was the sudden pressure of his fingers on the lips of the Condottiere ; then throwing himself on his knees before him, with uplifted hands he seemed to implore his help, and rising instantly, he retreated towards the house, beckoning Montesecco to follow, while, with his finger on his lips, he evidently wished to impose on his supporter the silence he himself practised. From the earnestness of the boy’s manner, Montesecco judged that something had happened ; and, no longer hesitating, followed the cautious steps of the young Greek.

He soon gained the entrance to the house. The outside door was open, but that leading to the room where the travellers had been lodged, was closed and fastened, and as Montesecco passed he heard the sound of angry voices within. Leading him

up a few steps, the boy suddenly seized the hand of the Condottiere, and pressing it fervently to his lips, pointed downwards, at the same time crouching on his hands and knees. Montesecco understood the appeal, and following his example, he found that a sliding panel in the wall, which had been only partially closed, gave to view the whole of the iniquitous scene enacting in the room below.

Stretched upon the floor was the venerable form of the traveller who had excited so much of the attention of the Condottiere. Tightly bound and gagged, he lay at the mercy of two ferocious looking ruffians, who, with the old man to whom the house belonged, were the other occupants of the chamber. The truth instantly flashed upon the mind of Montesecco. The old man was in league with the robbers, and the house was one of those with which the Campagna abounded, and into which unwary travellers were decoyed to be plundered or to die, as might best suit the purposes of the fierce brigands who infested the neighbourhood of Rome.

A gloomy silence had taken the place of the late angry discussion, and Montesecco bent his ear to

the opening of the panel, in order to catch the first sentence that might be uttered. It was the old man who first spoke.

“ I tell thee, Carlo,” he said to the eldest of the ruffians, “ it is of no use to take his life. I know who he is—I saw him pass this way before ; and I know he is rich ;—he will pay for his ransom.”

“ Ay, and send the Condottiere with his troops to scour the Campagna, and drive us all, like sheep, to the mountains,” replied the robber, with a hoarse laugh.

“ No, that will never do, friend Domenico,” observed the second of the brigands ; “ we must either put him out of the way at once, or thou must send him to keep company with some of thy guests below ;” and he pointed to the floor of the room.

“ What ! in the dungeon, and alive ?” replied the old man with a shudder. “ Now the saints preserve me, but I should never sleep without thinking I heard him rattling the bones of all those that are there already. No, I never could bear the terror of it—and with so little of the spoil too for my share,” he added in a whining tone.

“ By Saint Peter !” exclaimed the fierce Carlo, “ if thou darest to grumble, this hand shall send thee below to keep company with the skeletons thou so lovest ;” and he shook his clenched hand at the trembling wretch before him.

“ Nay, good Carlo—thou art merry,” said the old man, with his teeth chattering, and his knees shaking.

“ But what of the gold ? how much ? - - - ”

“ What is that to thee, thou old scarecrow,” interrupted Carlo with a growl. “ Thou hast more than thou needest I think for thy vile body, and all the gold in the Pope’s coffers would not save a soul like thine one hour of purgatory.

“ Here, Anselmo,” he continued, addressing his companion, “ put that in thy doublet ;” and he threw him a small bag which he had taken from the vest of the stranger. “ And now be quick—decide—what is to be done with this lump of clay ?” and he spurned with his foot the prostrate body of the captive. “ Decide, for I must be gone. The Pilgrims swarm to the city—there may be some worth lightening of their alms.”

“ Dispatch him at once,” replied Anselmo ; “ the

day is breaking—we should have been miles hence ere now.”

“No, no,” cried the old man, “slay him not; or if thou dost,” he added, looking round fearfully, “thou must slay the boy too. He sleeps now; but he may wake, and bring ruin upon us.”

“He shall not wake,” said Carlo calmly, “where is he?”

“Above, in the little chamber,” answered the old man; “but touch him not; his ransom will make us rich for ever,” and the old man rubbed his hands as he spoke.

“Cease thy chattering,” cried Anselmo, “what dost thou know of ransom? one stroke of this will be the best,” and he laid his hands on his poniard as he spoke.

“I know,” cried the old man; “the prisoner is rich as he is great. It is Hassan the merchant,” he continued, in a lower tone; “and the Pope himself would ransom him, sooner than harm should befall him.”

“What,” cried Carlo, “Hassan, the rich merchant of Smyrna? Now out upon thee, thou old dotard, to think that name is aught but his death

warrant. Were he to escape, and tell his tale, not a brigand within a hundred miles of Rome would be alive at this hour to-morrow ;” and rising he advanced with fury towards the prisoner.

Another moment, and all was lost ; but ere he could draw his dagger, Montesecco sprung from his hiding place.

“ Ha ! betrayed ! villain, take that ! ” shouted Carlo ; and, as he spoke, he plunged his dagger in the heart of the old man, who fell dead at his feet.

The next instant, the sword of Montesecco was at the breast of the robber. Fierce and terrible was the struggle that ensued. Throwing away his sword, the brave Condottiere pressed upon the brigand so closely that ere he could draw the knife from his belt, a deep wound in the side had been inflicted by the short poniard which Montesecco carried, while the armour of the latter protected him from the furious blows which Carlo aimed at his breast. Wounded, but not disabled, the brigand continued the fight, attempting to retreat towards the door, a chance of escape which the superior science of the Condottiere as constantly

prevented. Step by step, and inch by inch, the combatants disputed the ground, when an accident had nearly deprived Montesecco of his life.

The young Greek, despite the prohibition of the Condottiere, had followed him when he made his sudden entry among the robbers; and unable to cope with them by strength, had employed a stratagem, the success of which proved the sagacity of the device. Springing from his concealment, while the second brigand, with his back turned to the secret panel, was listening to the suggestions of Carlo, the boy had with the speed of light contrived to seize from behind, both the arms of the robber; and entwining them with his own, pinioned him as securely as though he had been bound with cords. In vain did the brigand try to shake him off, the young Greek clung to him with the tenacity of a wild cat seizing on its prey. The quick eye of Montesecco marked the struggle, and his heart trembled for the result. The robber had the advantage in point of strength, but the agility of the boy was surprising, as, scrambling and clinging, he endeavoured, and successfully, to prevent the second brigand from coming to the rescue of his

companion. Charmed with the heroic bravery of the young Greek, which, notwithstanding his own peril, Montesecco plainly perceived, he continued to cheer and encourage him by his voice. His own antagonist now began to waver, when a heavy fall close to his side announced that the strength of one of the other combatants had yielded. For an instant Montesecco turned his head, but in that instant, while a well-directed blow from his hand disabled the arm of the brigand ready to plunge a dagger to the heart of the poor boy who lay struggling beneath him, the brave Condottiere felt the point of a weapon upon his own shoulder. Madened by the pain, he returned with double fury to the charge, and in a few moments the fierce Carlo lay dead beside his companion, who, unable to defend himself after the wound inflicted by Montesecco, had been stabbed by the boy, whose life had so nearly paid the forfeit of his rash but noble courage.

CHAPTER VII.

RELIEVED from his bonds, the first movement of Hassan was to throw himself into the arms of his brave defender ; and Montesecco forgot all his former doubts and suspicions as he listened to the thanks of the captive whom he had rescued. But if his mind was relieved as to the mystery which had hitherto attended his fellow-traveller, his heart was deeply moved as he looked upon the frantic joy of the young Greek, at the safety of his companion. Again and again, he wound his arms round the venerable form of Hassan, stroked his long beard, looked at his hands, and kissed and wept over them with passionate fondness, as he pressed them to his heart. Still he did not speak ; and it was only on Montesecco addressing some words of praise to him, that the secret was revealed. The boy was dumb.

“How long,” asked Montesecco, who was inex-

his parents died ere they could na
sorrow that awaited them. Poor
continued, as he fondly stroked t
curls of the young Greek.

“He is not then your son?” inquir

“I have no child,” replied Hassan
sigh, as he thought of the cruel
only daughter of his love. “But
dained that two orphans, both G
father.”

“And yet,” observed Montesecco
tation, “I should not say that G
the country of your birth.”

“No,” replied Hassan sadly, “
though Italy is now my home.
elapsed since I was driven from my
then I have in my arms the infan

were happy and at peace; but a pestilence arose, and once again I fled from the home where my best friends lay dead, bringing with me Melanthe the daughter of my adoption, and poor Gennaro, the only child of those two bright and beauteous ones, whom I had seen laid side by side in their grave. God is merciful! I was spared to watch over the fatherless. I came to Rome—I have toiled for them. Heaven befriended me; I am rich. I owe my life to their parents, and Hassan is not ungrateful.”

The old man paused in deep emotion. It seemed that unrestrained communication was foreign to his nature, so great was the effort he appeared to make in thus revealing his history to Montesecco; but the heart of Hassan was full of affection, though the habits of his nation, which long years of separation from it could not break through, had inured him to reserve and silence.

“Heaven will reward you,” said Montesecco; then calling to mind the absurd suspicions with which his head had been filled during the journey, he gaily recounted them to Hassan. “Why did

you not speak to me?" he asked, "when you must have seen my anxiety that you should do so?"

"My son," replied Hassan gravely, "it is my rule never to speak unless it is necessary; and if I have prospered in the world, it is chiefly by the observance of this rule. You asked me no direct question, therefore why should I have trusted a stranger? but the heart that has risked its blood, and the hand that has struck in our defence, are no longer those of the stranger, therefore Hassan has told thee all, and now bids thee follow him to his home; henceforth shall Montesecco be unto him as a son. Let me bind up thy wound, then will we depart."

To this proposal Montesecco gladly acceded. With skill and tenderness the old man bandaged the shoulder of the Condottiere so as to enable him to proceed upon his journey; and Gennaro leading his horse from the stable, they turned from the scene of bloodshed, and once more took the road to Rome.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was a garden on the banks of the Tiber. Bright and lovely was that garden, as on the desolate bank of the rapid river it stood alone in its beauty ; for the shore on either side was unmarked, save by some few straggling trees and bushes that hung over the low huts of the poor fishermen. It was the garden of Hassan the Turk ; or, as he was called at Rome, Hassan the merchant ; having, the better to disguise all traces of his former state, announced on his arrival that commerce was his profession, and Smyrna his birth-place. The truth of these assertions had never been questioned ; and Hassan steadily pursuing his course, had risen gradually until he arrived at a state of affluence ; while his cautious conduct in keeping aloof from the fierce feuds which the state of party in Rome constantly engendered, caused him to be looked upon with equal respect by all factions, and he

was open on all sides. Situated
beautiful garden, it bore more
an Eastern pavilion, than the
merchant ; but it was upon th
adopted daughter, Melanthe, a
tined for her recreation, that H
his chief care ; and often had
hour, when, released from the
education, she should quit the
he had entrusted her on his a
come to share with Gennaro
house and home.

That happy day had arr
Hassan still delayed his arri
pected hour, his child anxi
Tired with watching, Melant
towards the river. She was

only mode of education for the daughters of the rich and noble—they had shared the same tasks, enjoyed the same amusements, and happy in each other's love, had never known a want or a care. Now, on the first day of their liberty, their only sorrow had been endured. They felt that they were about to be separated. But though endeared by affection, until they seemed to have their very being in common, the two girls did not differ more in appearance than they did in character and disposition. The soft glances of Clarice had, in their gentle languor, an expression of touching helplessness; while the dark and thoughtful eyes of Melanthe seemed to scan the thoughts of all who met their mild but searching look. Above the middle size, the exquisite proportions of her figure gave grace and dignity to every movement, while the very twining of the pliant form of Clarice, as shaking back her glossy chesnut curls, she looked up in the face of Melanthe, spoke of timidity and dependance, and the beautiful Greek gazed tenderly down upon the half childish form and face of a companion somewhat younger than

herself, and strove to comfort her under their approaching separation.

“ Ah !” said Clarice, with a sigh, “ it is very well for you—here in this lovely garden with your painting or your embroidery, or those musty parchments over which you delight to pore, you may be very happy.”

“ And why should you not be so ?” asked Melanthe ; “ you who have a father to love and cherish ?”

“ Oh yes !” replied Clarice, “ of course I do love him ; but you know he never speaks to me ; or if he does, it is of things I cannot understand.”

“ Then why not try to understand them, dear Clarice ?” said her friend ?—“ why not try to have ideas in unison with those around you ?—It would make you happier, and be better for all parties.”

“ Oh ! you can do every thing, but I never should succeed,” said Clarice, pettishly. “ My father never speaks of any thing but the state of parties in Rome, or the grandeur of our house, till I am sick to death of the glories of the Orsini.”

“ You would not despise a lineage and a name,

could you feel the misery of being without one," said Melanthe, sadly.

"Dear Melanthe," cried Clarice, embracing her, "I did not mean to make you unhappy—why do you always grieve over that one subject?—you know Hassan has declared that he is certain of your father's safety, for that it has been ascertained that he quitted Constantinople unhurt, and came to Italy: one day, his abode will be discovered. Till then be patient."

"I will try to be so," said Melanthe, with a melancholy smile, "and you will promise me the same."

"Oh, as to me, the Madonna grant me patience. Shut up all day in that gloomy palace of my father's, how I envy you this lovely garden, and the gay spirits of Gennaro all day long to keep you company."

"But you will have guests, Clarice. You forget the Prince—your father has summoned you a week sooner than you expected, to do the honours of his house to the young Lorenzo de' Medici, who comes to congratulate his Holiness."

"How I wish he had staid at Florence,"

exclaimed Clarice. "If it was only for the way I have been tormented about him, I am resolved to hate him."

"A wise resolution," said Melanthe smiling; "take care that the contrary effect does not ensue from so much determination."

"Nonsense," said Clarice blushing; "but really I do grieve at having been obliged to leave our convent in such a hurry. I could not even finish the piece of tapestry I had promised the good Sisters for a covering for the Madonna's footstool."

"You can finish it at your leisure," said Melanthe. "If that is your only omission, you will have little to confess."

"Nay, I have more than that," said Clarice, shaking her pretty head mysteriously; "but tell me, Melanthe, do you think, now we have left the convent, we shall still have no one to confess to, except Padre Anselmo? I cannot tell why, but I never could kneel by that man's side without a shudder. I always felt as if the *Malocchio* was upon me, when I met his bright black eyes peeping out from beneath his cowl!" and Clarice, who was very superstitious, crossed herself devoutly, which

prevented her remarking the confusion which the name of the priest had spread over the countenance of Melanthe. The crimson blush which had for an instant burned upon her cheek turned to a deadly paleness ; and averting her head, she would have sought for some pretext for absenting herself from the side of her companion, when fortunately the sound of horses' feet was heard rapidly approaching.

“ It is Hassan,” exclaimed Melanthe.

“ Yes, and Gennaro,” cried Clarice. “ Farewell, dear Melanthe, I will leave you to your happiness ; but do not fail to be with me to-morrow, in time to receive our guests.”

“ I will not fail,” answered Melanthe ; and Clarice, quitting the garden by a side gate, proceeded to the Orsini Palace, while Melanthe turned to the house to welcome her adopted father and her play-fellow Gennaro. With trembling horror she listened to the account which Hassan detailed, of the danger from which they had been rescued by the bravery of Montesecco ; and the blush of delight with which the young Condottiere received the fervent thanks of the beautiful being who stood before him, showed

that he was already reconciled to the prospect of the life of inactivity which at first he had dreaded, and which he knew must be his portion ere the effects of the dangerous wound he had received could pass away.

CHAPTER IX.

AND now it seemed as though all Rome kept holiday. The Pope had declared his intention of receiving, in full state, the congratulations which the republic of Florence conveyed through its young chief, Lorenzo de' Medici, and it soon became known in the city, that it was the desire of his Holiness that every honour and respect should be paid to him, and the Florentine nobles who accompanied him.

Early in the morning, when the first interview between the Pope and Lorenzo was to take place, every street and window was crowded with spectators, anxious to behold the young man whose fame had already preceded him. Perhaps also, the good citizens of Rome were not sorry to have the variety of a peaceable procession, instead of the constant clang of armed men paraded through their streets, and domesticated as it were in the palaces of their nobles, a measure rendered necessary by the turbulent state of the times, where might was right,

and every excess permitted or pardoned to those who could pay for their crimes or enforce their demands.

The friendly disposition of the newly elected Pontiff towards the republic of Florence was hailed as an omen of approaching tranquillity. To follow the example of the Pope and Cardinals, was always deemed a measure of policy by the Roman citizens; and even in those who did not approve, subserviency was too convenient to be cast aside for opinion. Bright and gladly rose the sun upon the city of Rome, and before long every spot leading from the palace of the Pope was crowded. Banners floated from the walls and roofs of the houses; the balconies were hung with tapestry and rich velvets, bands of music were stationed at intervals, and every eye was strained to catch the first glimpse of the citizen Prince, as he issued from the Orsini palace, where he had been welcomed as the son of an old and valued friend, by the proudest of Rome's ancient nobles, Jacopo Orsini.

But the ponderous gates still rested on their hinges; and, tired with waiting, the multitude began to murmur at the delay, when a movement was

observed in the opposite direction, and soon the rich liveries of the attendants of a Cardinal announced the approach of one of that body; and Roderigo Borgia, the most powerful, the most splendid, and the most daring amongst those whose dominion was absolute and whose licence unbridled, rode into the street which led to the palace of the Orsini. As a special mark of favour, he had been deputed to conduct Lorenzo to the presence of the Pope. As soon as the people became aware of his purpose, the air was rent with their cries, "Viva sua Eminenza il Cardinale Borgia!" "Long live the Cardinals!" "long live the Pope!" was shouted by thousands of voices; and the pride of the haughty Cardinal increased tenfold, as he viewed the symptoms of popularity which his presence excited.

Well did Roderigo Borgia understand the passions of those whom he sought to govern. The love of show was not the least of the weaknesses which he knew to be inherent in the Roman people, and to gratify it to the utmost was always his care. A few years previously, the dress and equipment of the fathers of the church had been more consonant to the spirit in which they professed to

govern their flock ; but Paul II., who was a very handsome man, had, in order to render the dress more becoming, and thus to ensure the good will of such of the Cardinals as had equal pretensions, departed widely from the primitive rule of modesty in appearance. He granted to the body of Cardinals permission to wear the purple robe and jewelled tiara, hitherto sacred to his own use ; also the scarlet habit, and housings of the same colour for their horses. Upon this occasion, the proud Borgia displayed to the eyes of the multitude the whole glory of his insignia. Jewels flashed from his tiara, and sparkled not only upon his bridle rein, but the deep fringes of gold which bordered the housings of his steed were studded with gems, and the stirrups of gold, and crimson velvet saddle, also shone with jewels.

The Cardinal, as he reined in the prancing steed, which tossed its plumed head impatiently at the restraint, rode more with the air of a knight trained in the lists, or on the field, than that of a modest churchman ; and preceded by his guards, his pages, and forty running footmen, in suits of scarlet silk and gold, made his way through the assembled

multitude, returning with courteous benedictions the admiration they bestowed, until, having reached the Orsini palace, he disappeared with his glittering train beneath the portals. Without dismounting, the Cardinal returned the greetings of the circle assembled within the court of the palace; and not sorry to be obliged to appear in a character which he so well suited, he backed his horse until he stood opposite the balcony where Clarice and her beautiful friend Melanthe were seated; and bowing gracefully, in return for their salutation, resumed his place in the procession; yielding to Lorenzo the place of honour, he took his way, riding at the left side of his young companion, to the palace of the Pope.

There could not be a greater contrast than was afforded by the appearance of Lorenzo de' Medici, and the proud Borgia. The splendid dark beauty of the Cardinal, enhanced by the brilliant colours of his dress and equipment, might have cast into the shade one of less pretensions than Lorenzo; but the noble air of the young Florentine could not be eclipsed. Tall, and beautifully formed, he looked to peculiar advantage on horseback.

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the one by his virtues, the other by
memorable era in the annals of Italy.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Lorenzo and the Cardinal arrived at the Palace of the Pope, they were ushered at once into his presence. Passing through a lofty hall, which was lined with men-at-arms, the Cardinal preceded Lorenzo and the citizens who had accompanied him, up the long flight of marble steps which led to the apartments above. On each step, and at either side, stood two servants of the Pope. All wore the same magnificent livery of scarlet silk, embroidered in gold, with caps of purple velvet, looped and bordered with rich bands, upon which the cypher of his Holiness, surmounted by a mitre and triple crown, were worked in jewels. At the top of the stairs were the pages, dressed in purple and silver, and the whole length of the gallery was crowded with officers of different grades, and the attendants of the Cardinals and grand functionaries,

who had been summoned to do honour to the young Florentine.

As the door of the audience chamber opened, Lorenzo felt almost bewildered by the glare and magnificence which burst upon him. Around the throne, and extending in a semi-circle, were ranged the dignitaries of the Holy See, according to their rank. The first row was composed of the Cardinals who wore the embroidered robe of purple and the tiara of jewels; the second row contained the Bishops, who were placed on seats behind, although a little above the others, and were dressed in fine scarlet cloth, with deep capes, bordered with gold, and mitres of the same metal upon their heads. The third row, consisting of those who had only attained an inferior grade, had robes of white cloth clasped with silver; while the minor officers, filling up the space behind, were clothed simply in black.

Upon a throne blazing with jewels, sat the newly elected Pontiff, Sixtus IV. ; and as Lorenzo, having first done homage at the foot of the throne, ascended the ivory steps which led to it, that he might kiss the foot of the Pope, and receive his blessing, he

was struck with the contrast between the scene and the individual who occupied the most conspicuous place in it. The diminutive form of Sixtus seemed actually sinking under the weight of so much grandeur; and his small and pinched features, and restless grey eyes, which appeared to look with distrust upon every one who approached him, gave little idea that his intellect was equal to the exalted nature of his station.

“’Tis well, my son,” he said, after listening to the address of Lorenzo, who, in the name of the republic of Florence, offered the customary congratulations upon the accession of a new Pope. “’Tis well—the Holy Church hath need of true and honest servitors; and we, by the grace of God, her father and her head, know how to prize the love that, for her sake, is tendered to our unworthy self. We thank the citizens of Florence for this their friendly greeting; and to thee, my son, we say the honour is more great, that one of thy name should thus lay the homage of his city at our feet. As Rome is dear to Florence, so are the Medici to the father of the Holy Church. My son, we bid thee welcome.”

So saying, the Pope slightly rose from his seat,

and spreading his hands upon the head of the young man, as he bent before him, gave him his blessing. Then, re-seating himself, he received the thanks of Lorenzo for the signal favour bestowed upon him; and having made some inquiries as to the health of Piero de' Medici, and many others of the Florentine citizens, who had formerly been personally known to himself, he bowed his head, when, upon a sign from the Cardinal Borgia, who occupied the seat nearest to his Holiness, the citizens of Florence retired, and the doors of the audience chamber were closed.

Thus terminated the only interview which Sixtus IV., notwithstanding his professions of friendship, ever vouchsafed to one of the house of the Medici; yet Lorenzo, although the honour which he had received was unusual towards a simple citizen, felt a sudden conviction arise within his mind that the words and the feelings of the Pontiff were at variance with each other.

The flattery of the Cardinal Borgia, who, as he re-conducted Lorenzo to the Orsini palace, failed not to dwell upon the singular favour which had been manifested towards him, did not dispel

the impression which he had received ; and he determined not to quit the Holy City without a clear understanding as to the footing upon which Rome and Florence were to be for the future, and a certainty of the redress of sundry grievances, the removal of which formed part of the business of his present mission.

But it soon appeared that business was the last thing to be thought of in the city of the Pope. Upon every attempt of Lorenzo to obtain some definite promise of an arrangement of the points which he strongly urged upon the attention of the Holy See, he was met by procrastination and objections, which, though futile, still retarded the fulfilment of his hopes ; and, as if to compensate him for the disappointment which was often too evident in his manner, a constant scene of festivity occupied the hours which should have been devoted to graver pursuits.

Lorenzo, though endowed with prudence and sagacity beyond his years, was fond of pleasure, and particularly addicted both to martial exercises and the sports of the field. To gratify these inclinations, the worthy fathers of the church spared

countenanced ; and the luxury & distinguished the houses of the passed into a proverb.

But where all transgressed as different positions and inclinations regardless of restraint, and most famous was Roderigo Borgia.

This extraordinary man was Spaniard, having been born in 1475 and was supposed to be of princely race, once claiming the Valencia and Arragon. Endowed with talent and power of intellect equally in all that he undertook was in some degree the certainty made him so deficient in perse-

subtlety of argument, soon distanced all competitors; but in a short time Roderigo left the field open to them by embracing the profession of arms. Here his determined courage and coolness in several actions, won for him fresh laurels, and a career of glory opened to his view; when, as if disgusted by success, he suddenly relinquished his military life, and resolved to retire into the country, and live unfettered by any profession. He had, however, no sooner adopted this resolution, than, by the death of his father, he came into the possession of a splendid fortune; and, at the same time, the elevation of his uncle to the Papal throne, under the name of Calixtus III., opened to him a complete change of prospect for the future. But by the advancement of his uncle, who had always regarded him as a son, Borgia instantly determined not to profit. He was resolved not to enter public life, and contented himself with simply writing a letter of congratulation to the new Pope. Calixtus, who had ever been an ardent admirer of the powers of his nephew, was so struck by this moderation, at a moment when, on all sides, he was assailed by claimants and satellites, that he would not allow

elapsed, he was surprised by a Roman prelate, bearing the news to a bishopric worth 20,000 ducats. On the positive order instantly to resign, he could no longer hesitate; he was once installed in his new diocese, he gave himself to his natural passion for profusion. The Pope, proud of the splendour of his nephew, bestowed upon him the means of enjoying the magnificence of Borgia eclipsed by the Cardinals. His palace was the most sumptuous of the city; and his country-house at a short distance from Rome was the seat of every species of amusement which it was possible to imagine.

the establishment of the luxurious Cardinal was on a scale of magnificence which few of the Italian sovereigns could have ventured to imitate. Hunting and hawking were his favourite morning pastimes; but latterly a new pursuit had nearly superseded all others. Horse-racing had just been introduced at Rome. The late Pope, Pius II., anxious for some recreation which might distract the mind of the people from objects less agreeable to the Holy See, had instituted the first horse races which had ever been seen at Rome. In a short time, the passion for racing was at its height; and immense sums were staked upon the spirited animals, which without riders flew along the street that led to the Piazza San Marco, now known by the name of the *Corso*. This was an amusement too consonant with the character of the Borgia, not to be, in a short time; carried to excess; and his stables were soon crowded with the finest and fleetest horses, which the most extravagant outlay could procure. In this, as in other distinctions of luxury and profusion, he stood unrivalled. Though past his fortieth year, such was the beauty and spirit with which he was endowed, that he did not

seem within ten years of his age; and whether in the lists, or on the field—at the chace, or in the bower, no hand was so sure, no step so free, no smile so gay, as that of the handsome Cardinal, Roderigo Borgia.

And this was the companion who had been chosen by the Pope, to obtain, if it were possible, entire possession of the mind of Lorenzo de' Medici. Fully informed as to the capacity of him who was destined to be the future Governor of Florence, the wily Sixtus, who foresaw, in the rising greatness of that republic, the germ of a power which might eventually be dangerous to the interests of the Holy See, determined that the master spirit should be ruled by one under his own guidance.

For this purpose, he had selected Roderigo Borgia, whom intrigues for the future occupation of the Papal chair had placed completely in his power, and by a conjunction of interest rendered also inimical to any further rise of the Florentine dominion. The choice had been well made. Experience gave to the Cardinal an advantage, of which he did not fail to avail himself. Young and enthusiastic, Lorenzo readily yielded to the

fascinating influence of the gay and accomplished Roderigo, the indecorum of whose conduct was partially excused by the extreme licence of the times ; and though little mingled with respect, a warm friendship soon sprung up in the breast of the young man towards one who appeared devoted to him, and to the interests of his family. But friendship between two natures so dissimilar, could not be of long duration.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE Rome was thus occupied with the scenes of festivity, Montesecco was lying feeble and helpless in the house of Hassan the merchant. His wound had at first assumed an alarming appearance, and for some days after his arrival, so great had been the suffering and fever it had occasioned, that he had been unable to leave his couch. Latterly, however, his strength had so much improved, that he was able to seek the refreshing shade of the garden; and there, in the society of the beautiful Melanthe, the hours passed away so softly—so joyously—and so fleetly, that their hearts had taken no heed of time, and weeks flew by, and again the hue of health returned to the cheek of Montesecco, ere he had spoken of quitting the retirement which had become so dear to him.

His thoughts, which seldom before had wandered from his duties in the field, had now taken a

different direction; and he bitterly repented the rash impulse which had urged him to bind himself to the will of another. He knew not the day, nor the hour, when his services might be commanded at a distance, and once engaged in war, who could tell what might be his fate? And if even it had been otherwise, what had Montesecco to offer? Without a home—without a name, a wanderer upon the earth, could he ask the beautiful being before him to become a wanderer like himself? Would the tented field form a fitting shelter for one nurtured in luxury, or the din of a camp, and the perils of a warrior's stronghold upon some castled steep, a meet bower for her, who, bred up in the mild seclusion of a convent, knew nothing of the ways of the world, its bitterness, or its strife? Amidst such thoughts, the mind of Montesecco turned to him who might have averted this sorrow; but remembering the sternness with which Luca Pitti had repulsed his prayer during their recent interview at Florence, he felt that he had no hope, and no right to seek the love which he already prized above his life.

And yet day after day he lingered on the spot; and although no mention of the future was ever made,

avowal. If her cheek crimsoned as of Montesecco sought hers, she did their glance; if her heart tremble approached, she did not the less kind meet him. In the beautiful confider and happy love, she felt a security which placed all fear at a distance, the future in a veil of peaceful deli, sought not to put aside. So happy a ing state of love, that whenever she unusual expression upon the counte tesecco, her heart would sink withi trembled lest a word might destroy which she dwelt. How often does gr its shadow before it, while the heart f row, which it has no rational cause

Orsini, was surprised, upon entering the house of Hassan, to find that Montesecco was absent. She had been so accustomed to see him every day, that it appeared extraordinary that he should not occupy the same place; and Melanthe stood gazing with a sensation bordering on stupefaction upon the couch, beside which she had so often watched during his hours of pain.

She quitted the room, and walked through the garden to the terrace overhanging the river, where, in company with Hassan, Gennaro, and Montesecco, she had of late so happily passed the long summer evenings. Every inanimate object was as she had seen them the day before. The river gliding rapidly by—the bright sun tinting with gold the purple hills of the Campagna; and nearer to her were signs of life and joy—the butterfly still sporting on the variegated beds of flowers—the hum of the bee amongst the heavy boughs of the lemon trees—and the song of the joyous birds as they bade adieu to the deep blue sky. Melanthe thought upon all these—all that she had hitherto held so dear—all that had of late appeared yet more beautiful—then she turned to gaze upon a vacant seat by her side;

and neither the sun, nor the flowers, nor the birds, had power again to attract her eye, she saw only in the world that one spot—the spot which had been occupied by Montesecco.

It was vacant. Might it not be so again? and for ever? and for the first time Melanthe asked her heart what then would be its grief—what then would be to her the bright world around? The moment when the mind first perceives that its own power is gone, that through the heart it has yielded to another its best feelings—its warmest affections—its truest devotion—is one which, however rapturous, is not unmixed with terror. With the certainty of loving, comes the fear of not being beloved—the sensitiveness of an overstrained humility, detracting from self to invest the one beloved with virtues and qualities which make it appear impossible to approach him upon an equality. It is a beautiful weakness of woman's heart, to bow thus before a power elevated by the grandeur of her own soul and the tenderness of her love, to an ideal standard of perfection immeasurably above herself.

Melanthe experienced this feeling so exquisitely

as to cause her a sensation of alarm, which for the moment clouded her better judgment. With the idea of the love of Montesecco came a painful sense of her own insignificance. She thought of the superiority of his mind—his chivalrous sense of honour—his tried and renowned bravery and skill in the profession he had chosen—the estimation in which Hassan had told her he was held by all men ; and then, as her mind reverted to qualities which, if less brilliant, were more dear, his gentleness and kindness of heart, and the many accomplishments which lent to his society so peculiar a charm—she thought of herself. What was she, that he should love her ? and the humility of her heart answered, “ Nothing ! ”

Slowly and sadly she turned from the spot upon which she had gazed, with a devotion that conjured up to her view the form which had so often lingered there. She turned away, and leaning upon the marble balustrade of the terrace, the tears which had long gathered beneath the fixed eyelid, fell slowly upon her cheek—the first sweet tears of love.

Silently they fell, but not unmarked ; for in

suffused with tears. He took her hand, it with kisses, pressed it within his own, imploringly towards her, as if he would not to grieve. The intellect of Genoa had gained double strength from the trials under which he laboured. He apprehended everything by intuition ; and his devotion to Hassan and Melanthe, their looks and the words he could utter, he endeavoured if possible to forestall them. His constant occupation and delight was upon the rapidity of expression which he displayed, none could have imagined that the sense of hearing was denied him, as turning his bright eyes upwards, he followed the light course of the bird that warbled.

his misfortune. And now they stood together like two bright beauteous flowers, each entwining and supporting the other; and the tears of Melanthe ceased when she looked upon the sorrow of the boy, and, soothed by his mute endeavour to comfort her, she smiled once more. But the smile was checked by a sigh, as she involuntarily glanced towards the seat where she usually sat—Gennaro caught the direction of her eye—the cause of her sorrow rushed to his mind. For an instant, his face was suffused with crimson, and then, with a sob which convulsed his whole frame, he let fall the hand which he still held, and turning quickly away disappeared among the trees of the garden. His mood was often wayward; and Melanthe in a few moments had forgotten his abrupt departure—had forgotten his very existence, and the whole world, for Montesecco stood by her side.

BRIGHT was the smile the beautiful lip of Melanthe—the world around and the heavy words of gladness and the low the heart lightened of its load. which had returned to her as the heart of Montesecco. She beaming with joy; and yet, to her's, the look of the young troubled and sad. A recollection of evil from which she had suffered before flashed across the mind she would not suffer it to dwell that the least observation might

not lost upon him for whom it was practised ; and the sigh which accompanied the smile with which he spoke, somewhat chilled the eager joy of his companion.

She turned from him for a moment, and as she did so she met the bright eyes of Gennaro, who was standing at a little distance. Without analysing the impression which led to the conviction, Melanthe knew that she had in some manner wounded the feelings of the poor boy ; and now, partly to console him, and partly from a sensation of shyness, which she could not control, she felt the presence of a third party would be a relief, and she made a sign to Gennaro to take his place at her side. Gennaro, however, did not obey ; he only shook his head, and turned down an opposite path from that on which she stood.

“ Poor Gennaro ! ” she said ; “ how I grieve to have given him pain.”

“ Why do you imagine that he suffers ? ” asked Montesecco. “ His mood, like all who are so afflicted, is changeable ; but you never could have been unkind—it is impossible.”

“ Alas ! I fear that I may have been so,” replied

Melanthe. "It was but a moment since he was all joy and life, yet now he shuns me. I would that his life were happier," she added, with a sigh.

"And yet there may be those who envy even the life that you deplore as wanting happiness," said Montesecco. "Is it not better," he continued, "never to have known a joy, than to be compelled to resign those we have learned to value?"

"Perhaps it may be," answered Melanthe; "still I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of happiness, deprived of interchange of thought. All created beings, even all inanimate nature appear to have a language of their own; and to one endowed with such quick perceptions as Gennaro, it must be misery to be cut off from all intellectual communication. I often fear that he suffers, though he never complains."

"It is scarcely in human nature to suffer in silence," replied Montesecco. "The expression of sorrow may be for a time suppressed; but sooner or later the heart's grief will tremble on the lip."

The tone in which these words were spoken thrilled through the bosom of Melanthe. She

turned her eyes to those of Montesecco, but let them fall as she marked the depth of expression in his glance. For a moment neither spoke, and when the ear of Melanthe again caught the sound of that voice so dear to her, it was lower and more sad than she had ever heard it before.

“ You, who have so much kindness to others,” he said, “ will you think it presumptuous, if I entreat for pity ?”

“ Pity !” said Melanthe, in a tone of surprise.

“ Yes, pity ;” he replied. “ It is all I ask—all I dare to ask ; and when I am gone, when I am far away, think of me—if, indeed, you think at all, with pity ; for my sorrow is more deep than I can tell.”

“ You will not leave us ?” exclaimed Melanthe, hastily.

“ Alas !” said Montesecco, “ I leave Rome this night—this very hour. An insurrection has broken out at Volterra, and I am commanded instantly to march with my troops, so as to be upon the spot in case the Pope should see fit to interfere. I ought to have been gone long since ; but I could not leave you—leave Rome, I should say, without one

word of farewell—one brief word of thanks for kindness which I never can repay ;” and, he added, in a tone almost inaudible, “ for happiness I can never know again !”

But Melanthe heard him not ; or if she did, his words fell upon the ear without reaching the sense. The first were enough—enough to wither within her breast the heart that a moment before had beat rapturously, as she listened to his voice. He was going, and what was the world now to her?—a pathless waste—a region without a sun. The glory of her day dream was gone, the vision of joy she had conjured up had faded away before her eyes, and the chill that crept over her was all that remained, to tell how warm and bright were the hopes that had vanished.

Sick at heart, Melanthe could not answer the words which Montesecco had addressed to her ; she turned upon him a look of so much sorrow, that he at once saw the hope confirmed which he had long nourished in secret. The nature of Melanthe was not one which, under a semblance of modesty, endeavours to heighten the value of an avowal by a pretence of withholding it. She had

loved Montesecco too long to imagine that he was ignorant of the affection with which she regarded him. She knew that it was reciprocal, and had never sought to conceal her feelings. But too much occupied with present happiness, the vague manner in which she had glanced at the future, had prevented her from ever inquiring into the station or worldly advantages of him she loved ; and now, in the announcement of his sudden departure, she felt the confirmation of a terrible fear which had sometimes flashed across her mind, and she saw that they were about to be separated for ever. The grief of such a thought was too hard to bear. The colour fled from her cheek ; and, leaning on the balustrade of the terrace with one hand, while the other was pressed convulsively to her heart, she turned away her head to conceal the tears forced from her by the depth of her sorrow.

The emotion of her he so madly loved was more than the resolution of Montesecco could endure—the rapture with which he beheld the proof of his power over the heart which he coveted beyond every other possession on the earth, lit up his countenance with a sudden joy ; and drawing the hand

of Melanthe within his own, in another moment his determination to leave, unshackled by any vow, her whom he scarcely dared to hope it might be his to soothe and bless, was forgotten ; and words of passionate love had been spoken, and those dear lips, upon which trembled an avowal of the same heartfelt affection, had been pressed again and again to his own, ere he remembered the stern command, which forbade him, on pain of being cast off for ever, to link his fate with that of any one unsanctioned by him to whom he owed the obedience of a son.

There had been times when this command had weighed with Montesecco—when the voluntary promise he had given to Luca Pitti, rose up before him, and froze upon his lips the burning words in which he would have poured forth his love ; but those were the hours of reason, and when had reason aught to do with love ? It was not when the earth seemed to glide from beneath his feet—when the air and the heavens appeared as a chaos of light and joy so dazzling, that sight and sense reeled beneath its glory—when all was confusion, and thought chased thought in rapid whirling through

his brain, that Montesecco could think with measured coldness on the rash step he had taken:—the past and the future were merged in the present—in that one moment of superhuman bliss, when the certainty of being beloved first breaks upon the soul; and Montesecco, as he clasped the hand of Melanthe in his own, and kissed away the tears of joy which trembled in her eyes, forgot all save the beauteous being by his side.

Better had it been if he had remembered that the world still contained others besides her whose love had made it a paradise to him. He would not then have trembled as he marked the death-like paleness that overspread the face of her he loved, as, raising her head from the breast where it had rested, some hideous object seemed to fascinate her gaze. He would not then have felt the shock that turns the heart to stone, as, following that gaze, his eyes rested upon the fiend-like countenance of him, who had, doubtless, been a mute spectator of their transports—of him, who, of all the world, he most dreaded—of him, whose withering sneer, at such an hour, was like poison dropped upon sweet flowers—of the cold, the calculating, the insidious

perverted spirit.

“Woman!” he said sternly, and tone of his voice was the knell of pining, “what have you done? that he to whom you have plighted already affianced to another?”

The shriek with which Melant from his arms, and fled towards recalled the bewildered senses. Starting from where he stood, he followed her, but Luca Pitti laid his arm.

“You have disobeyed me once—If you re-enter that house, you are and she whom you love—Melanthe you more.”

“What means this mystery?” said

“ It is but for the present,” said Luca Pitti, soothingly. “ A little while, and you shall be free ; a little while, and the power of Luca Pitti over you will have ceased. Till then, be patient—now follow me.”

CHAPTER XIII.

IN a small room, the windows of which were high from the ground, and closely barred with iron, sat four men, apparently in deep deliberation. He, who occupied the upper end of the narrow table, which stood in the centre of the room, was distinguished by little save the excessive meanness of his appearance. It would have been difficult to have recognised in the meagre individual, whose scanty habiliments bespoke almost abject poverty, the potentate who, on public occasions, was wont to show himself so gorgeously attired and surrounded, had not the cunning and restless expression which so forcibly characterised the countenance of Sixtus IV., been of that peculiar kind, which, once beheld, never could be forgotten.

He was the son of a poor fisherman of Savona ;

and although obscurity of birth does not necessarily entail degeneracy of taste, yet the squalor of his present appearance was in unison with his nature. Pomp and splendour were the masks with which he sought to delude the public; while distrust, meanness, want of faith, jealousy, and revenge, equally raged within his breast, whether that breast was covered with the robe of purple, or the frock of serge.

Clothed in the garb of a Franciscan, the order to which he had belonged previous to his elevation to the Papal chair, his head covered with a small worn-out cap of velvet, his elbows resting on the table before him, and his feet and garments carefully tucked up, upon the bars of the arm-chair, sat Sixtus, listening apparently with delighted attention to some intelligence which the Cardinal, Roderigo Borgia, was detailing to him in a low voice. The other two occupants of the chamber were Piero Acciajuoli and Francesco de' Pazzi, both Florentine nobles, banished from their native city, the one, for having openly conspired against the Medici; the other self-exiled by a rancorous jealousy which rendered their very

with which they scanned the old man, as some expression usual escaped from his lips, showed their interest in the subject now

But still greater was the alarm with which the words of Borg the Pope; and more than a temptation might have been traced in the handsome face of the Cardinal, grasping eagerness of a man anxious to increase the authority of the wealth which must so soon be in the hands of Borgia, however, had his own reputation with an almost servile submission to the Pope; and although the Cardinal had been for some time in the thoughts, he affected to have

suggestions to which he now listened were original emanations from his own brain.

And now it appeared that the conference was about to break up, for the Pope, raising himself from his leaning posture, threw himself back in his chair, and rubbed his withered hands together with an expression of glee bordering upon idiotcy : for a few moments all were silent ; when a low tap at the door announced a visitor, and Luca Pitti entered the apartment.

“ What, alone ? ” asked the Pope, with an air of consternation, “ our intelligence was then untrue ? ”

“ May it please your Holiness, we had been rightly informed ; but upon questioning the young man, I found him in no gentle mood, and feared to bring him hither, lest he should too suddenly become possessed of our intentions. He only tarries to give some directions to such of his officers as remain in the city, ere he takes the road which he should have followed this morning.”

“ ’Tis well,” replied Sixtus ; “ but why went he not forth to-day, as we had commanded ? To dally thus, bespeaks a lack of zeal that ill-becomes the name of Montesecco.”

"A momentary weakness," so please your Holiness. "It is not the first time a soldier has been lured from his high duty by a woman's smile."

"A woman - - - what, in Rome?" asked the Pope, with more curiosity than quite befitted his sacred calling.

"Ay, in Rome. I found the brave Condottiere exchanging love vows with a Grecian damsel—the fair Melanthe, daughter of old Hassan the merchant."

"This must be looked to," said the Pope seriously; "we must not have our soldiers tampered with."

Luca Pitti had not noticed the start with which Roderigo Borgia had heard the name of Melanthe in conjunction with that of Montesecco; but as his own object was to detach the Condottiere from any tie which might interfere with his influence over him, and that he knew, from the necessity of his services, neither the Pope nor the Cardinal could be indifferent to aught that might effect his independence, he was not surprised at the sudden interest which the subject appeared to have excited in the bosom of the Cardinal, who, making a sign

to him to retire from the council table, began eagerly to question him as to every word which had passed between Melanthe and Montesecco.

But the wily Borgia had soon extracted all that Luca Pitti knew of the affair; and a laugh, more befitting the lips of a boon companion than a reverend Prelate, broke from him, as he listened to the device by which Luca Pitti had contrived to separate the lovers without giving them time for any explanation. Each had their own designs in the matter; and, as they turned from the corner where they had stood during their brief but interesting conversation, and took their places at the table where the secret council of the Pope was held, both the Cardinal and Luca Pitti separately congratulated themselves that they had outwitted each other, by making it appear as though their anxiety to keep Montesecco unshackled by any domestic tie, arose solely from disinterested and public motives.

In those days, when fraud or force were the usual principles of action,—where every partisan, however humble, became an individual of consequence, either from the knowledge he might

possess, or the advantage to which his services might be turned, it was a matter of state policy that no intelligence respecting the habits, dispositions, or connexions of such persons should be neglected. Where the falling off of one adherent might endanger a whole state, it is not surprising that a rigorous system of *espionage* should have been established. To the intriguing and narrow mind of Sixtus this was a source of never-failing interest ; and to be fully informed of every circumstance relating to the meanest of his partisans, was a point upon which he particularly prided himself. It may be imagined that the least appearance of defection in so important a personage as Montesecco, the leader of a chosen band of several thousand men, was a circumstance which would occasion no small excitement in the breasts of those to whom his co-operation was so necessary ; and it required more persuasion than Luca Pitti had anticipated, to convince the timid and suspicious old man that no danger was to be apprehended from the attachment of Montesecco and Melanthe.

“ I believe what thou sayest, my good friend,” replied Sixtus to the reiterated assurances of Luca

Pitti that all fear upon the subject was groundless. "I believe it all—and thou hast acted wisely and well. But there are other dangers. This Hassan, who thou tellest me is the maiden's father, is a man of no common mould. None can tell from whence he came, and yet his influence in the city is great—his wealth unbounded, and all the greatest merchants from Florence and from Venice flock to his house. Thus much we know, yet so cautious is his speech, that which way in policy he inclines, none may say. Some call him a spy from Venice—some a secret emissary of the Medici. The Orsini are his friends,—Clarice, the daughter of Jacopo Orsini, is the bosom friend of this Melanthe, whom Montesecco loves. Through their influence, may not the Condottiere be withdrawn from us? or," he continued, and his voice trembled as he spoke, "may he not betray us, and hold us, the Father of the Holy Church, up to the scorn of all nations?"

"Fear not," said Luca Pitti, proudly; "the heart of Montesecco will break ere it betray. This love might have been dangerous, but I trust the means I have taken will have destroyed all hope within the bosom of the maiden; and as Monte-

tenance of Luca Pitti.

“ We will do more—a fitting husband found for the damsel ; but not an will give her to a Colonna.—Ha ! now there is the gay young Mariano (youth no maiden would reject.”

“ It will be time enough hereafter your Holiness,” interposed the Cardinal of giving a nameless maiden to one Colonnas ; when we have quelled their race and that of the Orsini, by —then may we risk an insult with revenge.”

“ True—true—most prudent Boniface Pope, somewhat alarmed at the power the words of the Cardinal arouse

All eyes were anxiously turned upon the face of the Pope, except those of the Cardinal, who sat abstracted, stroking his glossy beard with one hand, while the other played with the jewelled chain depending from his neck.

“It is to confide to you our unalterable determination to devise some plan whereby we may check the growing insolence of the Medici,” continued Sixtus, who, had he substituted the word “power,” for “insolence,” would have more nearly delivered the true meaning of his sentiments than he was wont to do. A murmur of approbation broke from the lips of the Florentine exiles, who had preserved silence during the earlier part of the discussion.

“We have none here but friends?” exclaimed Sixtus, looking timidly around, as he observed the silence of the Cardinal. A slight inclination of the head from Borgia, an intimation that he did not wish to be disturbed from his reverie before it was actually necessary, re-assured the Pope; and he continued:—“An important event has occurred. Filippo de’ Medici, Archbishop of Pisa, is dead. His loss may prove a death-blow to the influence of the family at Pisa; and the better to ensure it,

we have given the Archbishopric to Francesco Salviati."

"The most bitter enemy of the Medici," exclaimed Piero Acciajuoli; "and what say the magistrates of Florence to the appointment?"

"They have refused him possession of the Episcopal palace," replied the Pope, "and will not acknowledge the pontifical mandate."

"But," said Francesco de' Pazzi sternly, "will your Holiness submit to their dictation? If so, then farewell to any hope of recovering our rights."

"Nay, my good Francesco, you are too hasty. It was to consult you as to the best means of repressing their insolence, that we summoned you hither—you, who have been so foully wronged by the Medici. Our troops already march upon Pisa. The Florentine deputy has no force to withstand ours; therefore Salviati will sooner or later attain his rights. But it is to the future we look. On all sides is our power—the power of the Holy Church, circumscribed by the underhand influence of the Medici. This very day, we have heard that Volterra is in commotion. A mine of alum, of incalculable value, has been discovered near the

city ; the citizens claim its revenue for their state ; while the Florentine merchants have seized upon the profits. The matter has been referred by Piero to his son Lorenzo ; and not an hour since the messenger of Volterra quitted Rome, bearing back the answer of this insolent scion of the Medici, " That sooner should Volterra be reduced to a heap of ashes, than the city of Florence yield, even the shadow of a right possessed by her meanest citizens."

" Bravely spoken," exclaimed Borgia, for the first time taking part in the conversation. " This Lorenzo, when he comes to power, will find some work for the soldiers of the Holy Church, or I much marvel."

There was something in the nature of Borgia, which, if not noble, was yet capable of appreciating in others a pride of spirit congenial to his own. Sixtus turned a penetrating look towards him as he spoke ; but the interests of Borgia were those of the Holy See, and the sensation of distrust which had entered the bosom of Sixtus, vanished in a moment. He was about to speak again, when Francesco de' Pazzi, rising, exclaimed—

“Is it permitted, in the presence of your Holiness, to speak without reserve?”

The Pope made a sign of assent, and Francesco continued.

“Then would I affirm most solemnly, that, if the power of the Medici be thus permitted to increase, the downfall of Rome is inevitable. Nay, I meant not,” he said, observing the start of surprise with which the Pope and the Cardinal interchanged glances, “I meant not to say that the church will be deprived of her head, or the bench of the cardinals abolished. Nor, that the palaces of the nobles will be levelled with the dust. No, Rome will still have a Pope—the Cardinals will still surround the throne—and the nobles will flock to the Palace. The body may be the same—but the spirit will be wanting. Consider the state of Italy. On the one side, Rome, and the kingdom of Naples; on the other, the republics of Venice and of Florence. Compare the advance of the last with the retrogression of the others. Compare, and tremble. Rome, impoverished, forces the unwilling mite from the people, under the sacred mask of the Jubilee; and Naples, scarce supporting herself, trembles

before the threat of a French invasion ; while Florence alone dares to brave the whole world ; and Venice, proud of her friendship, covers the seas with her galleys for the protection of the interests of the Medici. The Florentine republic will rise till it stands a monument of greatness, founded upon the ruins of all those states which have not ministered to its pride. But it is not the pride of Florence, it is the ambition of the Medici, and their influence, that will work the ruin of Italy. Their commercial relations are established in every city. The riches of the East pour into the coffers of their bankers ; and so unbounded is their wealth, that were they to call in the loans they have made to other states, more than one crowned head would see his people bankrupt. By these means, they hold in terror half the sovereigns of Europe ; by these means, the flower of the nobility of Florence are exiles in a foreign land ; and by these means, if unchecked, will every state be undermined, till all the Potentates of Europe will tremble at their nod, and the Father of the Holy See become a puppet in their hands."

" 'Tis a fearful prospect, my son," said the

Pazzi, solemnly.

“Prudence may do much more.”

“What would you suggest anxiously.

“The extermination, root and branch, of those who, from citizens of Florence, became tyrants—‘*Death to the Medici*’

These words produced a great effect upon the aged Sixtus. He rose from his round—drew his garments close around him, while the nervous twitches of his hands prevented his feeling any comfort. He grasped. He gazed from one conspirator, for so they might be called, but gathered no comfort from

lips, which a sudden terror had blanched, resumed their blue and livid hue; and the thin fingers ceased their trembling, as the Holy Father of the Church crossed his hands upon the breast whose fears were hushed, as he beheld the calm and unmoved aspect of him whose will governed his own, and who listened with a smile of approval to a proposal of—*Murder!*

CHAPTER 2

IN the character of Montesecco of unequalled daring, and a seldom allied to intellect of an strangely blended a momentary he was personally concerned, the just conclusions to which his ment otherwise would have led had this been so apparent as communications with Luca Pi was the latter of this defect Montesecco, that the thralldor contrived to hold the man, looked as a hero, was chiefly n

though it were revealed to his sight; so had the incessant vigilance of Luca Pitti seized upon every variation of feeling in the character of the Condottiere. It was of little importance to one so crafty and designing, that the very weakness upon which he unhesitatingly practised, arose from tenderness of heart and affectionate solicitude for the wishes of others. The fear of giving pain to one who had watched over his childhood, and to whom, having never known other parents, he had always yielded the devotion of a child, had more than once interposed between Montesecco, and the spirit of independence which urged him to insist upon some disclosure relative to his birth and station.

Well did Luca Pitti know his victim! It only needed a word of reproach—a look of sorrow, to soften the gentle nature of Montesecco, and reduce him to obedience; and the concession which interest or worldly advantages could not have wrung from him, was offered up at the shrine of gratitude and affection. The struggle had often been difficult, but upon no occasion had he found an impossibility of obedience to the wishes of Luca Pitti, until the cruel mandate of the latter tore him from

the side of Melanthe; and, by the falsehood he had uttered, implying a want of faith on the part of Montesecco, estranged perhaps for ever the heart which he prized above the whole world. The master-stroke, upon which Luca Pitti so much prided himself, had well nigh been the cause of a serious quarrel between him and Montesecco; and, as they quitted the house of Hassan, so violent had been the indignation with which such an interference had been repelled, that Luca Pitti wisely determined that one who was himself labouring under so much agitation, could scarcely be a fitting counsellor in the secret chamber of the Pope, when a matter of life and death might hang upon each word incautiously uttered.

It was this which had caused Luca Pitti to return alone to the palace, from whence he had been dispatched by the Pope, to desire the presence of the Condottiere; information having been received that, though commanded to lead a portion of his troops towards Volterra, Montesecco still lingered in the city. A small body of soldiers had been dispatched early in the morning; and before Luca Pitti quitted the Condottiere, he extracted

from him a solemn promise that within an hour he would set forward with the main body.

And Montesecco had kept his promise, and soon his long lances glittered in the rays of a departing sun, and for the first time their young leader took his place with a feeling of despondency and regret, among the brave men who had so often marched at his command.

So accustomed were the citizens of Rome to the clang of armour in their streets, that few heads were turned as the clattering train of Montesecco wound along; and without interruption they passed through the gates of the city, and were soon lost to sight.

So far Montesecco had fulfilled his promise; but, in an evil hour for his resolution, as he ascended the hill on the opposite side of the river, his eye caught the dwelling of Hassan, resting beneath the shade of the beautiful plane trees which ornamented his garden. In the absence of verdure which was just visible around, the garden of Hassan was a landmark. The eyes of Montesecco were rivetted upon it. He could see the very spot, where, a few hours before, he had received the first vow of the

glowing heart of Melanthe. The terrace on which they had stood, gleamed painfully white above the dark bank of the river. Montesecco reined in his horse—he could not withdraw his eyes from the spot. There, beneath those trees, dwelt the being that he loved ; and “ perhaps,” he exclaimed, as the recollection of the harshness of Luca Pitti forced itself on his mind, “ the only being who loves me—the only one who ever has loved me ; and I abandon her at the bidding of a tyrant—abandon her at the moment when her ear is poisoned against me ; and leave a heart like her’s to gnaw itself away—a pride like her’s to writhe and wither under the idea of having been trifled with and deceived.”

It was too much to bear ; the love of Montesecco was too deep and too true, not to feel what must be the sufferings of the heart which he read by his own. One instant he glanced towards his troops—he might yet overtake them before their night’s march was over ; freed from the indecision which a short time before had cost him so dear, he turned his horse’s head towards the city, and did not slacken his speed until once again he stood before the dwelling of Hassan. Trembling with anxiety and love,

he threw himself from his horse, and entered the house. But vain was his haste—vain the hope which had added wings to his course, that a few moments would suffice to explain the dilemma in which he stood. The apartment usually occupied by Melanthe was empty. She might be in the garden. With hasty steps Montesecco traversed every well-known path. All was silent and solitary. He knew that Hassan had quitted his home the day before, on an expedition to a neighbouring convent; but where was Melanthe? Where was Gennaro? He, whose presence, though mute, ever added by his gay spirit to the joyousness of the scene? Where had he flown? In deep anxiety, Montesecco returned to the house. The servants were questioned—but no intelligence could be obtained.

“The Signora,” they said, “had not been seen for some hours. She might be at the Orsini palace—she might be at the convent—or wandering amongst the ruins, as was her constant custom.” In short, where she might be was a matter of conjecture; but one thing was certain, the dwelling of Hassan no longer sheltered the form of Melanthe;

Again and again did he travel
the garden, calling on the name
but the echo of his own voice was
received. Still, as he hesitated,
away, the light was fading from
danger of delay increased. Alas
him? What was now the whole
to the peace of the heart that
through his means, had been
He would have given all,—his
hope of station, and aspirations
but for one instant held the
to his breast, and whispered
not deceived thee!"

The thought of her contempt
than the anguish of her loss,

Melanthe, be faithful—be firm—we shall meet again !”

Few people in those days, save the Priests and the highest of the nobles, knew how to read or write, and therefore without fear Montesecco gave the scroll into the hands of Mariana, the aged female who was the personal attendant of Melanthe, with orders not to deliver it to any one except her mistress. This done, he mounted his horse. One moment he paused, and raised his head as if to catch upon the air the least sound that might betoken a coming footstep, but all was still and silent ; and with a deep and bitter sigh Montesecco left the spot, and soon had regained the road where he had separated from his companions.

And Melanthe ! could she have known the feelings with which Montesecco had again sought her home, what hours of misery might have been spared her ! Upon the first shock which the cruel words of Luca Pitti had occasioned, the impulse which was strongest in her mind was to hide herself if possible for ever from the gaze of Montesecco. Unconscious of all, except the bitterness of having been deceived by the person she loved, the poor

girl wandered on till weariness of body overcame the deep abstraction of her soul, and standing still for an instant, she passed her hand across her eyes, as if to clear away a mist that impeded her vision. She looked around. The spot where she found herself was strange to her. She had wandered many miles from Rome; and though she knew, by the faint crimson streak that tinged the heavens, that the time of sunset was past, and that the outskirts of the city were dangerous, not a shadow of fear entered the bosom of Melanthe.

Absorbed by one idea, which seemed to scorch her brain, her mind refused to admit a thought of less fearful power. But the fatigue she had undergone forced her to seek repose; and turning from the path, she threw herself upon the bank which overhung the river, and which was then covered by low brushwood, and a few stunted trees. Under one of these, which stood nearest to the water, Melanthe seated herself, and clasping her hands upon her knees, her eyes rested upon the deep waves of the Tiber as they rolled rapidly past. It appeared as though she counted them, so still and steadfast was her gaze; but she saw them not. Silent,

and as if frozen by the misery within her breast, she continued to sit ; and when, at last, as if with returning consciousness, she raised her head and looked above, the moon was high in the heavens, and the light of the gentle stars shone down meekly and reproachfully upon the struggle of human pride and passion. The soft beauty of the hour filled the breast of Melanthe with better feelings, and thoughts that had sprung to life from the torture she had lately endured, waned and faded, as she lifted her mind beyond the earth, with that glorious elevation of spirit which ever reminds us that a divine essence is mingled with our mortal clay. Sinking upon her knees, she raised her clasped hands to heaven, and as she prayed for comfort and support beneath her first hard trial, tears, which during the long day had not passed her strained and scorching eye-lids, poured upon her cheek. It was sad and touching, to behold the grief of that young heart, shrinking almost from itself under the blight of its early hope ; and meekly pouring out its sorrow to Him, who alone could know its bitterness and its depth ! Sharp was the pang with which Melanthe tried to tear from her

besom the feeling which still lingered there, and long, and fervently did she pray; and when she arose from her knees, her spirit was more calm. The first grief subdued, her naturally firm mind gradually recovered its tone, and the sense of the folly and impropriety of her having so long absented herself from her home rushed to her mind. She immediately turned to retrace her steps; and following the course of the river, she had not proceeded far ere she was met by Gennaro. The poor boy had followed her, and been a mute spectator of her despondency and distress; but such was the innate delicacy of spirit with which his affection towards her filled his breast, that, like a faithful dog, he was contented to watch over her, and claim no other reward than a look, or a word of kindness!

CHAPTER XV.

SCARCELY had the sound of the footsteps of the horse which bore Montesecco in his journey, died upon the ear of Mariana, ere she had broken the promise she had given; and with Stefano, the old man who filled the office of gardener and porter in the household of Hassan, was seated in the open porch of the dwelling, and by the light of a small lamp which stood upon the table, studiously endeavouring to decipher the meaning of the few words which Montesecco had traced upon the scroll, which he had delivered to her with so many injunctions of care and secrecy. In point of care, no one was more trustworthy than Mariana; but secrecy was a virtue, which, with her garrulous propensities, could not be expected. It is true that so far she obeyed the behest of Montesecco, that from the body of the household she concealed the fact of a document so precious being in her possession;

but not to impart to a single soul the suspicions she entertained, the hopes that she had formed, and the symptoms she had observed, was an effort of moral courage, to which poor Mariana was totally unequal. Having brought out from her stores some wine which she knew to be a particular favourite with Stefano, she placed the jug before him. Then, seating herself, and leaning her hands forward to encircle the lamp, she held the scroll in every possible direction, in the hope that by some accident she might discover the meaning of words, of which she could not read a single letter.

“ Well—it is very extraordinary,” she at length exclaimed, “ that people will write in such a manner that one cannot make it out.”

“ It would be still more extraordinary if you could,” observed Stefano, “ as you do not happen to know how to read.”

“ I not know how to read !” rejoined Mariana, sharply.

“ Not a whit better than myself, and I am sure I should not know whether the letters were turned upside down or not,” replied Stefano, meekly attempting, by a confession of his own ignorance, to

subdue the curiosity which he knew always raged in the bosom of Mariana at the bare possibility of discovering a secret. "And besides, if we did, you surely would not betray the confidence reposed in you by reading the letters of the Signora."

"Letters! oh, that might be a different thing; but a scroll—an open tablet—a bit of vellum—surely there can be no secret of importance upon such a thing as that;" and she held up the writing in the face of Stefano, as if to enforce her argument.

"If there were no secret, you would not be so anxious to find out the meaning of the words," said Stefano, who, though the chosen friend and confidant of Mariano, always delighted in mortifying or annoying her—a habit not peculiar to Stefano.

"And after all, what can it be to you?"

"What can it be to me?" asked Mariana; "why, who should it be any thing to except to me, I should be glad to know. Am I not the Signora Melanthe's nurse? Did not these arms receive her the very first day she landed at Naples? Oh! that was a day; I think I see it all still before my eyes. All the poor wretches landing from the ships that had saved them from the cruel Turks!

There they came, hurrying out of the boats as if the Turks were at their heels ; and when they found themselves on dry land, oh ! to see how they knelt and prayed. And some wept, and some danced for joy—and some stood quite still, and looked so piteously around ; for they were alone—they had lost all ; women their husbands, children their fathers ! Ah ! the poor children ! that was the saddest sight of all. When our good master, Hassan, came past with an infant in his arms, a pretty smiling thing, I looked at it and blessed it ; and then he turned to me and said, ‘ Good woman, if you are a mother, take pity on this child.’ I was a mother, or rather, I had been,” continued Mariana, sobbing, “ for my sweet child was in its grave, and I took pity on that of the stranger. The Holy Virgin forgive me, but I think I loved it soon as well as my own poor little Ginevra, who is with the angels in heaven. Since then, have I not been a mother to her ? My beautiful Signora ; and our master says she is a great lady, and will one day have her rights. Ah ! well, that will be a blessed day ; and she will not forget her poor Mariana.”

“ That I am sure she will not ; she deserves to

be a queen—the good Signora ; she always praises my flowers, and gives me a new doublet twice a year,” said Stefano, warmly.

“ But see, Mariana, the jug is empty,” and he held up the wine jug, to show that he spake the truth.

“ Well, well, wait a moment,” replied Mariana, who was again busy examining the scroll. “ But is the lamp going out, or the moon, that it is so dark, all in a moment ?” and she turned abruptly towards the entrance of the porch - - - A shadow, light and rapid as the summer cloud throws upon the waving grass, seemed to pass over the bed of flowers between the porch and a large tulip tree, which stood in advance of the group nearest the house ; but Mariana, whose sight was rather dim, could not discern further.

“ Now, my good Mariana, one more cup ere the Signora returns,” said Stefano ; “ I wonder what keeps her out so late.”

“ Oh ! she is fond of the moonlight,” said Mariana quickly ; for though secretly resolved to lecture Melanthe for her midnight ramble, she could not bear that any one else should venture to

find fault with her. "And Gennaro is with her, so there can be no fear."

"Then a little more wine, I pray you," urged Stefano. "This watching is weary work;" and he stretched himself out at full length upon the seat, supporting his head upon the table.

"Now, do not go to sleep," said Mariana, "and leave me here all alone."

"No, no, good Mariana—fetch the wine, and you will find me wakeful enough, even to read the cavalier's letter," replied Stefano laughing, and settling himself still more comfortably.

"Ah! the scroll," said Mariana; and as if recollecting its importance, she placed it carefully in the middle of the table; and recommending Stefano not to touch it, took up the jug, and went towards the house for a fresh supply of wine.

But that which Stefano had already drunk was quite sufficient to overpower his not very acute faculties, and in a short time he was fast asleep. Then once more across the broad stream of light that the moon threw upon the ground in front of the porch, trembled and flitted a shadow without shape or distinctness—a shadow that came and

went as though the branches of the tulip tree were stirred. For a moment it vanished, and then again appeared more distinct, till at length it increased to a height almost gigantic, moving along with slow and measured pace towards the house. At the same time the grating of a footstep upon the gravel might have been heard ; and a moment afterwards a solitary figure, whose frock and cowl and sandalled feet bespoke the sanctity of its calling, slowly emerged from the shade. At this unwonted hour, what errand of charity or deed of mercy can have summoned the holy father from his cell ? Is it to shrive some passing soul—to calm the terrors of a death-bed by his holy words, or to listen to the deep-drawn sigh with which some poor penitent struggles to gasp out his confession, that the minister of peace wends his noiseless way to the dwelling of Hassan ? Alas ! it is none of these. In all ages, too often has the garb of religion served as a shelter to the hypocrite ; and too often had the base and profligate Cardinal profited by the disguise his holy calling afforded, to forward his infamous schemes.

Beneath the robe of a mendicant friar, Roderigo

Borgia now crept as a cowardly spy to the house of Hassan. The vigilance of his emissaries had not failed to detect and inform him of the return of Montesecco, his subsequent departure, and the prolonged absence of Melanthe from her home. The passion he had long since conceived for her had lately increased almost to frenzy, which he found it impossible to control ; and the unexpected obstacle which had arisen in his path by the discovery of the love of Montesecco, had nearly deprived the cautious Cardinal of his habitual prudence and cunning.

The first object of Borgia was, if possible, to discover what had been the conduct of Montesecco during his hurried visit ; and determining not to trust to any one but himself, he had wrapped himself in the disguise, in which, as her confessor, during her residence at the convent, he had been in the habit of visiting Melanthe, and hastened to take the best position he could obtain close to the house of Hassan, intending, if no other opportunity offered, to enter it as a poor travelling friar, and ask for hospitality for the night. Chance, however, favoured his views in a manner for which he had

scarcely dared to hope. Every word uttered by Mariana had been distinctly heard by him, and only one step was wanting to grasp the prize he expected would contain full information of the future plans and intentions of Montesecco.

It was an anxious moment, as the Cardinal crept to the porch. His weight caused the gravel upon which he trod to sink and crackle, and more than once he paused without daring to advance his foot, lest the sound might disturb the slumber of Stefano. At length, he gained the entrance, and stood upon the marble floor ; the lamp still burned, and threw its light upon the small white tablet which the designs of Borgia had made so precious in his eyes. Never did the hand of a miser clutch his gold with a more eager grasp than did the irreverent hand of the Cardinal seize upon those few words of love, which had been the only solace of the writer, and would have been a mine of wealth to her for whose eye they had been intended. Scarcely had success crowned the dastardly act of Borgia, when the sound of approaching steps warned him to depart ; and springing from where he stood, he was soon lost in the shadow of the trees. A moment after-

wards Mariana returned to the porch ; and before she could effectually rouse Stefano from his slumbers, Melanthe, accompanied by Gennaro, stood once more by her side.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH ill-concealed delight, Melanthe listened to the news of the visit of Montesecco. Again and again she made Mariana repeat the manner of his arrival—the hour—the very minute; and bitterly now did she regret the waywardness of spirit which had kept her from her home. The disappointment of Montesecco weighed more upon her heart than did her own sorrow; for, acquitting him instantly of any wish to deceive her, she knew how great must have been his suffering at not being able to explain to her the true meaning of the cruel words of Luca Pitti.

“ Did he leave no message?” she asked, having, by her hurried questions, so bewildered the faculties of Mariana, as to render her utterly incapable of recollecting half of what she might otherwise have done.

"None, that I can remember," replied the nurse, putting her hand to her forehead.

"What! not one word, to say when he would return?" said Melanthe; "he might have written - - -"

"Written," interrupted Mariana; "Oh, Santa Madonna, that I should have forgotten it—he did write - - -"

"Where—where is the letter?" exclaimed Melanthe.

"Letter, there was no letter; only a tablet—an open scroll."

"Open?" said Melanthe, in a tone of disappointment, for her heart had, for the instant, revelled in the idea of the first letter addressed to her by him she loved.

"Yes, open. The Signora knows poor Mariana cannot read; and if she could have done so, would not the secret have been safe with her? The silence and discretion of Mariana - - -"

"Yes—yes—I know," interrupted Melanthe: "but, good nurse, dear nurse, the letter?"

"Nay, I tell thee it was a scroll."

"Well, well, then, the scroll—but give it me—

where hast thou put it? Is it in thy boddice—or thy vest? Where—where is it?” and Melanthe began rapidly to examine the many folds of the ample black dress of Mariana.

“Nay, child, have patience; you do hurry me so. I remember now, I laid it on the table in the porch. Come with me—you shall see it;” and Mariana turned from the room which they had entered upon the arrival of Melanthe, and, accompanied by her and Gennaro, sought the porch, where they found Stefano still fast asleep, the lamp burning, but the scroll had disappeared.

“Where can it be?” exclaimed Mariana. “I laid it here, close beside the lamp. Get up, you lazy old creature,” she added, at the same time shaking Stefano by his arm.

“More wine,” said the suddenly aroused gardener.

“Wine! you have had too much already,—where is the tablet I laid here, by the lamp?”

“Lamp?” echoed Stefano, who was only half awake.

“There is the lamp. Corpo di Bacco! cannot

you see it and the wine jug?" and he seized upon the latter, as if about to carry it to his mouth.

"No, no, my good Stefano," said the soft voice of Melanthe; "we want a letter—some writing—that was placed by the lamp."

"Ah! the Signora returned," said Stefano, rising, and trying to recover his senses, so as to recollect exactly what had happened. "Yes, I remember, Mariana was trying to read it, and I said - - -"

"Bestia—Bestia maledetta!" cried Mariana, in no gentle tone, at the same time shaking Stefano by the shoulders; "who wants to know what you said? What have you done with the scroll?"

"I done with it! why, I never saw it since - - -"

"Now, the sweet saints grant me patience," exclaimed Mariana; "he never saw it. Look here, Signora; look here, my child; before I went to fetch that jug of wine, I placed the writing there, on that spot;" and Mariana laid her hand on the table; "the lamp there, and that useless incumbrance of a man there, upon the bench."

"No, I placed myself," began Stefano.

“Peace, fool! plague that thou art. It was ill enough done, whoever placed thee where common sense was wanting,” cried Mariana, angrily.

“Now, Signora! could the scroll have gone from the table without hands?”

“Did you see any one enter?” said Melanthe, calmly, without replying to the question of her nurse.

“No one, Signora.”

“And have you not got it, think you, in your dress?” suggested Melanthe, whose heart was sinking as she beheld the overthrow of her dearest hope.

“Certainly not,” said Stefano, beginning to untie his doublet; then suddenly pausing, “how could I have taken it, when I was fast asleep before Mariana would fetch me a drop of wine? The last thing I remember was hearing her grumbling voice, and seeing that tulip tree nodding at me, with its broad leaves wrapped about it like the good Father Anselmo’s frock.”

Melanthe started, as the name of the priest fell upon her ear; but Gennaro, who had been attentively watching what was to him a pantomime, seized the lamp, and following an idea which

appeared to have suddenly struck him, lowered the light to within a few inches of the ground ; and taking his course in the direction in which Stefano had pointed, he carefully examined the dewy surface of the grass, as well as the soft gravel in front of the porch. From the gestures of Mariana, he had perfectly understood that something had been lost, which was an object of interest to Melanthe, and that Stefano was accused, although innocent. The habitual watchfulness of Gennaro immediately suggested the idea that some other person had been present ; and no sooner did he observe the attention of Melanthe directed to the dark grove of trees which so nearly approached the house, than he resolved to ascertain whether any one had passed that way since the evening. For some time he could not discover any thing ; but at last he came to a small open portion of the grass, upon which the mark of a sandalled foot was heavily impressed. The close green sward, saturated with dew, retained even the crossed lines formed by the leathern thongs with which the monks fastened on their sandals ; and Melanthe, as she followed the invitation of Gennaro, and looked upon the discovery he had

made, too plainly read the secret which was concealed from the mind of her companions. Making a sign to Gennaro to desist from his search, and smiling to convince him that what she had lost was of little value, she bade Mariana carry the lamp to her apartment, and turning to Stefano, she said, "Has Padre Anselmo been here to-day?"

"He came at sunset past the gate, to give his blessing to poor Domenico, who lies sick on the other side of the street, and just looked in, to ask if our master had returned."

"And you told him he was still absent?"

"I said the house was empty, for the Signora had gone out; and then he asked if you were alone?"

"And what answer did you give?"

"That the Signor Gennaro was with you."

"'Tis well. Should the Holy Father inquire for me again, bid him seek me at the Convent; and, till the return of Hassan, see thou that no stranger passes within the gates."

CHAPTER XVII.

MANY days had elapsed, and yet Hassan had not returned; and at length, yielding, to the prayers of Clarice, Melanthe consented to become an inmate of the Orsini palace. Very different was the scene which its interior presented to the solitary and anxious hours she had lately passed in the seclusion of the dwelling of Hassan; for so great had been her fear of meeting the Cardinal, who, under the disguise of a Franciscan friar, constantly beset her path, that she had not ventured to leave the house.

The tranquillity of her mind had in some degree returned, and so implicit was her trust in the honour of Montesecco, that, from the time she heard of his having returned to seek her, her mind had been relieved of the horrible oppression under which it had writhed from a suspicion of his integrity. Could he not have met her eye with an unblushing brow, she knew he would not have returned. She

knew it ; and, as her mind dwelt upon the fact, her heart swelled with pride in him whom she loved ; and whom she had so honoured, that, to believe him guilty of a falsehood, had bowed her to the earth.

There is no anguish equal to that of being forced to condemn the being that we love. It is a feeling which, like most others, is not unmixed with self-love. Pity for the guilty, joins with regret and almost shame, that we could have been thus deceived, and so far blinded, as to waste a pure feeling upon one who has proved his unworthiness of so great a blessing. The dearest glory of woman's heart is the moral excellence of its idol. It is a part of the wild worship she delights to pay, and which differs widely from the nature of that which she is accustomed to receive.

The heart of Melanthe was peculiarly formed for the devotion of affection ; and the certainty that she had not been deceived in the high honour of Montesecco, was so consoling, that she resolved to endure with fortitude the separation which, before her mind had been assailed by its late disquietude,

had appeared a sorrow too deep for calm contemplation. Her anxiety with regard to the journey of Hassan daily increased. His hope that in one of the many monastic institutions with which the north of Italy abounded, Elphenor should have sought a shelter, had been so often disappointed, that Melanthe scarcely dared to encourage a sanguine feeling as to his present success. Yet at times so persuaded had she been by the assertions of Hassan that her father still lived, and was even in the neighbourhood of Rome, that she had more than once, when chance had led her abroad, forgotten all other objects in the fancied resemblance she had traced to Elphenor in some individual present.

But vain had hitherto been all the researches which the devotion of Hassan, or the filial affections of Melanthe, led them to attempt. Nothing certain had been discovered, except that, in the general massacre of the Greeks, upon the sacking of Constantinople, Elphenor had not perished, but, with many others of his country, had found a refuge in Italy. There almost all the learned Greeks had retired into monasteries; and the con-

stant habit of changing their name, to which fear had led them in the first moment of their escape, redoubled the difficulty of tracing an individual, who, having no interest in the country of his adoption, chose rather to consult his own safety by remaining unknown, than to gratify the curiosity of strangers by revealing his former name and history. Still, unchecked by disappointment, Hassan persisted in his inquiries, and his present absence was caused by intelligence, which had been mysteriously conveyed to him, that the dwelling of Elphenor had been discovered in a monastery at some distance in the Appennines. Hassan, attended only by two servants, had immediately set out upon his journey; yet when day after day elapsed, bringing no tidings of his return, Melanthe listened to the entreaty of Clarice that she would no longer seclude herself, but join in the gaieties which the sojourn of Lorenzo de' Medici had now rendered almost habitual to the Orsini palace.

“And you will confess,” said Clarice to her friend one day, when they were preparing to attend a festival given in their honour by a noble of the Orsini family, “that the life you lead here is rather

better than that which I had so much difficulty in persuading you to abandon."

"If not better, at least it is more amusing," replied Melanthe, "than sitting all day alone."

"Well, I am glad you own that," said Clarice. "As for me, now I have seen what a gay life in the city is, I only wonder how I could have endured the monotony of our convent."

"And yet, do you remember how sorry you were to leave it?" observed Melanthe; "and how bitterly you lamented having to return home to do the honours of your house to your Florentine guests?"

"Ah! that was because I did not know anything about him—about them I mean," answered Clarice, who, as she corrected herself, blushed deeply. Melanthe smiled, on observing the heightened colour of her friend; and then she sighed, for a remembrance of her own sorrow and her love made her tremble at the least symptom of any preference shown by the artless and somewhat childish Clarice.

"Do you know," said the latter, "that I have a strong suspicion that Lorenzo and the Cardinal are not on such good terms as they were?"

“ What Cardinal ? ” asked Melanthe, surprised at the observation of her friend.

“ Why the Borgia, of course. There is but one Cardinal worth looking at,” replied Clarice.

“ Why should you think so ? ” inquired Melanthe, carelessly.

“ Oh, for different reasons. You remember the hawking party the Cardinal gave us last week. Well, I overheard him muttering to himself as you rode past with Lorenzo—‘ Insolence ! these citizen princes would engross all : ’ and several other things of the same sort. And then again, when Lorenzo had given you the green and silver brocade, for which he had sent to Florence on your admiring some that you had seen, the Cardinal happened to be present, when you went down to the great hall ; he was passing through to my father’s apartment, and you did not see him ; but I did, and never did I see a man look so furiously as when you stood upon the steps, and held out your hand to Lorenzo, who bent his knee as he kissed your fingers.”

“ And so, from such trifles you imagine some quarrel has taken place ? ”

“ Not exactly a quarrel ; but I am sure they do

not like each other. Not that Lorenzo told me, for he never speaks seriously to me as he does to you," said Clarice simply, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

"Dearest, remember I am much older, and more grave," replied Melanthe, fondly drawing the beautiful head of Clarice to her bosom. "He knows, too, the deep anxiety I suffer from the uncertainty of my poor father's fate."

"Is that all that has made you so anxious of late?" asked Clarice, smiling archly.

"It is enough to do so," said Melanthe, gravely.

To confide the deep passion that filled her heart to the ear of another, would have been almost a profanation of its sublime nature. Least of all, to the volatile Clarice could such a mind as that of Melanthe look for approval or support. The light words of her friend had, however, filled her not only with regret, but with alarm. Engrossed by her own love for Montesecco, she had scarcely marked the progress of an affection which had sprung up in the bosom of Lorenzo de' Medici towards herself. As Clarice had said, "He never spoke seriously to her;" with Melanthe he not

only spoke, but thought. In all the excursions which he delighted to make in the neighbourhood of Rome, in search of the many treasures of antiquity with which it abounded, it was ever to Melanthe that the observations and reflections of Lorenzo were addressed. When the memory of the past took the place of the interests of the present, it was to her comprehensive mind that his allusions or inquiries were submitted; while, towards Clarice, a more common-place gallantry marked his attentions. The sympathetic attraction of two minds so elevated beyond the common range of intellect, had been almost instantaneous.

Among all the proud daughters of Rome, who sighed for his notice and regard, Lorenzo had found none who sufficiently interested his thoughts to make him consider whether, in his position, it were justifiable to lay his homage at her feet. But Melanthe, once seen and known, was a being not to be forgotten; and before many days had been passed in her company, Lorenzo had decided that no care or sacrifice, on his part, should be wanting to gain her affections, and induce her to become his wife. No thought of his power and his wealth

ever suggested itself as offering any security towards the attainment of the object he had in view. To Melanthe, he knew all would be comparatively indifferent, save the intellect and high character of him to whom she gave her heart—that heart, how did Lorenzo sigh for its possession.

Lorenzo had not passed his one-and-twentieth year ; and yet the violence of the love with which Melanthe had inspired him, had changed the whole current of his thoughts ; and he looked forward with aversion to the grandeur with which the future would invest him, as he contemplated the possibility of his suit being unsuccessful. He thought of the long years during which he might be doomed to drag out an existence, only relieved from the cares of state by the society of one to whom he never could be otherwise than indifferent ; for the powerful mind of Lorenzo might sacrifice its dearest hope, but to change was not in his nature ; and every hour that he gave to deliberation upon the subject, more and more confirmed the impression he had received.

Many weeks had passed since he had enjoyed, almost without interruption, the society he so much

prized, and yet he had never dared to hazard a declaration of his affection to Melanthe. Her manner was so calm, so dignified in its kindness towards all, that Lorenzo scarcely ventured to imagine that it varied towards himself. It was true his society appeared to interest her ; it was true, that, to hear his opinion, she would frequently pause while engaged in conversation with others ; and more than once, he had felt his heart beat wildly as he marked the uplifted head and parted lips of Melanthe, as she turned, and he fancied with interest, to listen to his words. Then how they seemed to expire ere his voice could give them utterance—then how his wonted confidence would fly from him ; and he, who would fearlessly have stemmed the course of thousands by the torrent of his eloquence, now faltered before the eye of a young and gentle girl.

But Melanthe did not perceive it. Too much engrossed by her own feelings, she had lost the tact and instinct by which a woman, unshackled by her affections, can trace the windings of those of another, ere he himself is conscious of their existence. Montesecco, the soldier of fortune—the

wanderer without a name, was the idol to which every hope of Melanthe was turned. The earth held no other wealth for her. What were the palaces of the Medici? Her heart was with the homeless and the poor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE return of Hassan being still delayed, Melanthe, whose fears had been soothed by the arrival of a message, announcing his intended journey to a more distant part of the country, remained an inmate of the Orsini Palace; and Lorenzo, whose stay in Rome was now drawing to a close, still hung upon her every accent, and watched her steps with a solicitude which had become apparent to every one save the object of it. As his love increased, so did the terrible fear which had taken possession of his mind. The indifference of Melanthe filled his heart with sorrow, but still he persevered in his attentions; for each hour he felt more deeply that to resign all hopes of her affection was an effort almost beyond his strength. Every thought was engrossed by the love with which she had inspired him; and he scarcely dared

to confess to himself the distaste with which he now regarded the objects, which before had seemed to him of paramount importance.

The negotiation of several points of interest to Florence was suspended — all subjects of grave meditation dismissed from his mind ; and even the attractions of art neglected, unless when enhanced by the smile of Melanthe. If she approved, then all glowed with the bright colouring of love ; and without her opinion, Lorenzo soon found it impossible to decide upon any thing.

One of the motives of the journey of Lorenzo to Rome had been the desire of enriching his native city with all that was most valuable in works of art ; and since his arrival he had expended enormous sums in the collection of the finest pictures, statues, and gems of all kinds with which Rome abounded ; but which were comparatively little appreciated by those who had groaned under the servitude of the late Pope, the professed foe of literature and artists. With what pleasure did Lorenzo contemplate the magnificent collection which daily increased. Each object tended to recal some happy day on which the taste and judgment of Melanthe had been con-

sulted ; and the hours thus spent Lorenzo now felt had been the happiest he had ever known.

How sad is the reflection that our sweetest visions of bliss are generally in the past ! Too soon, Lorenzo proved the bitterness of this truth. For many days a presentiment of evil had hung over his mind. Perhaps it was that mystic influence which our thoughts sometimes appear to exercise on all around us ; or perhaps it was, that Melanthe had discovered the true nature of sentiments which filled his breast ; but Lorenzo fancied that a sudden chill had fallen upon each inmate of the palace, and that more particularly Melanthe sought to avoid all conversation with him. Clarice, whose ill-disguised preference had scarcely been noticed by him, now attracted his attention by her troubled and hurried manner whenever he addressed her. Her father, Jacopo Orsini, appeared suddenly changed ; and from being wrapped up in his own consequence, now watched every movement and word of Lorenzo with a cringing servility ; and Melanthe—oh ! too surely Melanthe was no longer the same. Instead of the frank and gracious smile with which she used to meet him, he saw, with despair, a look of

measured civility, instead of the kind and friendly greeting, words of form and coldness met his ear. The change was too sudden—too cruel,—and the prudence of Lorenzo gave way. He decided at once to know the worst—he would know wherefore the little favour she had hitherto bestowed upon him was thus suddenly withdrawn ; and should it prove that indifference to a passion he felt he had latterly but ill concealed was the cause, he would instantly leave Rome.

Scarcely had he come to this determination, than the mystery which had urged him to its adoption was cleared up. A messenger from Florence brought letters from Piero, announcing the startling fact of his having already commenced negotiations with Jacopo Orsini, for a marriage between Clarice and Lorenzo. The consent of Jacopo had been obtained, and it only remained now for Lorenzo to submit to the mandate, which forced upon him an alliance which he had never even contemplated as possible. The surprise with which he continued to gaze upon the words which thus annihilated all hope in his bosom, almost prevented his understanding their full meaning.

Too soon the full misery of his position became apparent. The habit of contracting persons who had never perhaps seen each other, was one of too common occurrence in that age to excite any surprise in the bosom of Lorenzo. He knew that in his position he belonged to the state; and an alliance with the Orsini was a matter of too much importance to Florence to be overlooked. It at once established the power of the Medici in the very heart of Rome; and Lorenzo, as his mind rapidly glanced towards the future difficulties in which any objection on his part must involve his country, felt his heart sicken as he reflected that perhaps the sacrifice, upon which he instantly determined, might not be appreciated by her for whose sake it would be made. His high sense of honour, fully as strongly as his affection, forbade him to yield obedience to a mandate, to which otherwise he would have bowed. How often had he expressed his readiness to sacrifice himself for his country!

In the full confidence of the willing obedience of his son, Piero had proposed the alliance to Jacopo Orsini. Lorenzo felt this; and yet he was

about to disappoint the hopes of a parent he loved. It was a bitter thought, but one which weighed almost less upon his mind than the fearful political consequences which a slight towards the proud race of the Orsini might one day entail upon Florence. The love of his country—of his native city, was almost more powerful than the affection he felt towards his father : but his love for Melanthe was far above either ; and scarcely an hour had elapsed since he had received the letter, which threatened to be so fatal to his happiness, ere he sought her presence.

Melanthe was seated in an alcove at the bottom of the garden of the Orsini palace ; and at the moment that the hurried step of Lorenzo brought him near the spot where she usually passed the mornings, it appeared as though she was occupied in drawing. A group of exquisite beauty was the model before her ; it was one of the choice relics of ancient sculpture which formed part of the collection of Lorenzo, and which had particularly attracted the attention and admiration of Melanthe. A few days before it had been a subject of common interest to them both ; and now, as the eye of

Lorenzo rested for a moment upon it, a pang shot through his heart, as he remembered the comparative happiness of that hour, when the beauty and grace of the figures, and the exquisite skill of the workmanship, had been the theme of their conversation. He paused at a little distance, to gaze upon the yet more beautiful form of Melanthe, and then perceived, what, in the hurry of the first glance he had not observed, that the marble was not more motionless than the being who gazed upon it. With eyes distended, and lips apart, Melanthe sat as though she were turned to stone. Her face was very pale—horror was upon every feature, and she grasped convulsively the implements of her drawing, which were on the table before her. So great was the shock which her appearance caused to Lorenzo, that for the moment he forgot his own hopes and fears, as he sprung to her side, and entreated her to disclose the cause of her sorrow. Roused by the sound of his voice, Melanthe turned her eyes towards him ; but it was evident she had not heard his words, for in a voice hoarse from the violence of emotion she said, hurriedly, “ You too have not accused me ?”

“ Me? Great heavens !” exclaimed Lorenzo, “ what can you mean ? Accused - - - ”

“ Yes, accused,” replied Melanthe ; “ accused—suspected—condemned—all in one little hour. Oh ! it is hard to bear ;” and she passed her hand quickly across her brow as she spoke.

“ By all that is most sacred, I conjure you to explain what has happened,” said Lorenzo.

“ I cannot,” replied Melanthe.

“ I implore,” continued Lorenzo ; “ will you not confide in a friend ? Who - - - ”

“ Friend,” interrupted Melanthe, “ I have no friends ;” and she threw herself back in her seat, and covered her face with her hands. Her attitude was one of such deep dejection, so different from her usual proud bearing, that it touched Lorenzo to the heart. He could not bear to see her grief—he would have sacrificed all, even his dearest hopes, to have been able to call back the smile to her lips. Something terrible must have occurred, though of what nature he could not form a conjecture. Sinking on his knee by her side, he once more conjured her to tell him the cause of her grief ; but she remained silent, and gave no other sign of having

heard his words, than a slight motion of her hand, as if entreating him to desist from his inquiries. Lorenzo was not so easily silenced.

“Hear me,” he said, “and answer me only one word. I have not deserved this utter want of confidence—why am I thus forbidden to share your distress? Speak to me. Speak but one word—I will ask no more. Speak to me, or must I seek from others the meaning of this grief?”

“Oh! no, no,” exclaimed Melanthe wildly; “not from others—not even from me. Leave me—do not seek to know more, or seem to feel for me. You will only draw more misery upon me. I am going hence,” she said sadly, “and none will see me again. But, before we part, I will pray you to think kindly of me; and if they tell you I am worthless—vile—degraded—as they have told me. Oh God! that I should live to hear it! do not believe their words.”

“Believe them!” said Lorenzo, “I would sooner die than doubt you. Speak to me—trust me, and you will see that your confidence is not misplaced.”

The manner of Lorenzo was so respectful, and appeared so full of truth, that Melanthe felt her

scruples give way. "I will trust you," she said. "A messenger has arrived from Florence."

"Ha! how know you that?" asked Lorenzo, hastily.

"I do know it; but perhaps you do not know that the purport of his coming is no secret to the owners of this palace. It is many days since another envoy arrived with letters from your father, proposing an alliance of which he only now informs you. This, for reasons best known to Jacopo Orsini, has been kept secret from you."

"And," said Lorenzo, whose heart sunk at these words, "how can that affect your happiness?—how influence your fate?"

"It can—it does," replied Melanthe, solemnly. "Your marriage with Clarice must take place."

"Must—oh heavens!" exclaimed Lorenzo, passionately, "you wish it—you can speak such words—you who must know that my every thought is your's—that to please you I would resign all else. Melanthe, hear me—do not turn away. Will you not look upon me? You know not how much I love you—how, from the hour that we met, I first admired, then loved you; and now you bid

me—calmly bid me—wed another. Oh, unsay those words—do not tell me that I am *nothing* to you. I will endure—I have endured—so much—such torture of suspense—I did not dare to think that you could love me; and yet to doubt it was such anguish - - -”

Lorenzo paused, overcome by his emotion; and Melanthe, as she looked upon his manly sorrow, could not doubt the sincerity of his words. Her heart sunk from the bitterness of the reflection that the selfishness of her own love had been the cause of the unchecked growth of a passion which now revealed itself with such force; and in the anticipation of the terrible consequences which might ensue from it, she felt the punishment of her imprudence. One instant served for her decision; and, turning to Lorenzo, she said, “Such words are not for me—I have no longer a heart to give.”

“You love another?” exclaimed Lorenzo.

“Yes, fervently—unalterably,” replied Melanthe, solemnly.

“Then farewell happiness! farewell all!” said Lorenzo, in a tone almost inaudible. For some moments neither spoke; and Melanthe, whose

regret at what had occurred was unfeigned, did not venture to raise her eyes towards him whom she felt she had so deeply injured ; but she knew that the hand which Lorenzo, as he pronounced the last words, had taken and pressed to his lips, was now wet with his tears.

“ Forgive me, if I have deceived you,” she said, gently ; “ believe me, it was unintentional.”

“ Was my love, then, so totally a matter of indifference to you, that you were not even aware of it ?” asked Lorenzo, in a voice almost choked by the sobs which he in vain endeavoured to repress.

“ Not so,” replied Melanthe ; “ but, absorbed by my own feelings, it was unsuspected by me ; and when I awoke from the dream into which a selfish sorrow had plunged me, it was too late. I had yielded to the charm of your society under the safeguard of another love. My feeling towards you could be only that of friendship ; and it was not until the intelligence of your being affianced to another reached me, that I felt that you - - - ”

Melanthe paused, as if unable to express the conviction which had followed ; and Lorenzo added, in a tone of sadness which forced the tears

from her eyes, "that I loved you. Yes, Melanthe, I did—I do love you beyond all that words can express. It is not mere admiration of your beauty, surpassing as that is; but in you I found every charm and every quality which constitutes perfection: a mind of masculine energy and strength—an intellect comprehensive and refined, blended with a true feminine gentleness and modesty—talent without ostentation, and learning without pedantry—and, withal, a depth of tenderness I fondly hoped might have been one day my own - - -"

Lorenzo ceased, for the sorrow which filled his heart was too overwhelming; a sorrow, which the sternest reason could not master; and for some moments the deep sob which burst from his breast alone broke the silence, and proved to Melanthe more deeply than words could have done, the strength of that love whose death struggle was so severe. The misery with which she looked upon the sorrow she had caused, at first dispelled the agitation under which she had been previously suffering. How could she remember herself, while beholding the grief of another; and already she

was beginning to speak words of comfort and hope of future peace to him who stood by her side, when, as Lorenzo turned from her to conceal the bitterness of the sorrow he could not repress, the folds of his mantle displaced some papers upon the table ; and an open letter falling upon the floor, caught the eye of Melanthe. With a cry of pain she raised it from the ground, and holding it towards Lorenzo, bade him read the contents. " This will prove to you," she said, " that others too are unhappy ! "

Lorenzo read the letter ; it was from Clarice to Melanthe ; a few cold lines simply informing her that, by the commands of her father, she must consider her friendship with Melanthe at an end. No word of regret, no expression of affection was added to soften the severity of the blow. The face of Lorenzo was lighted up with scorn as he finished reading the letter. " And this is the woman you desire me to love ? " were the first words of reproach he addressed to Melanthe, as he trampled the writing beneath his feet.

" Oh ! do not misjudge her thus," exclaimed Melanthe ; " the writing is hers—but," and she

looked fearfully round, "the sentiments are another's. She only obeys her father's command. I have seen him—his mind is poisoned against me. That I should have enemies may appear strange; but I know—I fear I have one—one too," she said in a lower voice, "whom I cannot name: he alone can have dared to asperse my character—to brand the name of Melanthe with shame. It is he, who has thus worked upon the mind of Jacopo to forbid me his house—to separate me from Clarice, from all my friends;—it is he, who will take from me, one by one, all those who have watched over me from infancy—who will leave me desolate on the earth, that I may be reduced to - - - no, I cannot speak it. Oh! my father, where art thou? Merciful heaven!" she continued, as she sunk upon her knees, "if he still lives, reveal to me the place of his concealment; or, if thou hast taken him to be amongst thy blessed saints, grant that his spirit may look down upon and protect his unhappy child!" And Melanthe, as she passionately uttered this prayer, burst into tears; while Lorenzo, in his turn, roused from the contemplation of his own sorrow, besought her to disclose the name of him

whom she supposed to be the author of the calumnies which had been circulated against her. This Melanthe firmly refused to do. Such was the repugnance with which the idea of Borgia filled her mind, that to speak his name was impossible—she felt as if to utter it were contamination too dreadful to be voluntarily incurred.

“It would be of no avail,” she replied, as Lorenzo again implored her to justify herself at least in the eyes of Jacopo, so that he should not deny her the shelter of his house during the absence of Hassan. “So artfully have the tales been devised, that, in appearance at least, if not guilty, I have been too highly imprudent not to have incurred suspicion. Clarice is pure and noble, and the stranger—the orphan perhaps,—helpless, vilified, and accused, is no meet companion for the daughter of the Orsini.”

As Melanthe spoke, she had drawn herself up to her full height, and the curled lip and flashing eye were so full of the expression of truth and noble pride, that Lorenzo looked upon her almost with awe. He could have knelt at her feet, as to one not of mortal mould; for the recital of her mis-

fortune had rendered her more sacred than ever in his eyes, and restraining himself by a great effort, he said—

“ If such are the dangers that threaten you, the day may come when you may want a friend ; promise me, that, if such is the case, you will forget the presumptuous hope with which my love had inspired me, and that you will seek me.”

“ I will promise it,” said Melanthe, unhesitatingly ; and she extended her hand to him.

“ I ask no more,” said Lorenzo, in a voice of deep emotion. “ You have said that you loved another ; I do not even ask his name—or whether it is in his power to avert the storm which gathers round you. I ask not if your love be happy—nay, do not weep—I cannot bear it. I cannot—dare not—look upon your grief ; but Melanthe, ere we part, say if there is aught in which I may serve you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Melanthe, “ consent to this marriage with Clarice.”

“ Consent ! ” exclaimed Lorenzo, clasping his hands in despair, “ consent to relinquish you, and wed another—what can demand so great a sacrifice ? ”

“ My honour, and your own,” said Melanthe, solemnly ; while this, the only allusion she would make to the infamous slanders which had been coined from the nature of her intercourse with Lorenzo, and her evident influence over him, dyed her face in blushes so deep and painful, that Lorenzo, in pity for her confusion, withdrew his gaze from her countenance, and pressing her hand reverently to his lips, turned away, and in another moment he had passed from her sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT day, Melanthe quitted the Orsini palace, without seeking further to justify herself. In an interview with Jacopo, which she had demanded instantly upon the receipt of the letter of Clarice, she had indignantly refuted the calumnies heaped upon her, and that in a tone so fearless and convincing, that Jacopo, had he been unbiassed by any interest of his own, might have doubted the authenticity of the facts which had been represented to him so insidiously, as to leave little doubt of the culpability of the accused. Nothing had been omitted which could tend to criminate Melanthe; and the fact of her having absented herself from her home in the company of Gennaro, during so many hours of the night, was one which, as she admitted it, while she refused to give any reason for a circumstance so unusual, strongly militated against her.

Poor Melanthe, how little did she imagine that those hours, during which she had unconsciously abandoned herself to the all-absorbing grief with which the suspicion of the faithlessness of Montesecco had overwhelmed her, would one day be brought against her as having been devoted to crime. But the very fact of their being adduced as proof of her guilt, pointed at once to her accuser. She remembered too clearly all the events of that day—the mysterious disappearance of the scroll entrusted by Montesecco to Mariana—the mark of the footsteps in the grass, and sundry dark hints which had been thrown out since, whenever, by compulsion, she had endured the company of Borgia at the palace of the Orsini—all convinced her that her accuser was no other than the Cardinal.

This conviction however, although important in relieving her mind of the fear of an unknown enemy, utterly annihilated any hope of establishing her innocence, which might otherwise have existed in her mind. The power of Borgia in Rome was absolute, his wealth unbounded, while his cunning and daring in execution made him a foe with

whom it was almost impossible to cope. No atrocity was too great for him, if, by its perpetration, he could achieve the object he had in view; and the unmanly cruelty with which he had destroyed the reputation of an innocent girl, only proved to Melanthe that her studied avoidance had inflamed, instead of subduing, the unholy passion which raged in his bosom. Her powerful mind had instantly read the mystery of the sudden accusation preferred against her, and at once comprehended the improbability that the almost fatherly affection with which Jacopo had formerly regarded her, would withstand the united influence of the insinuations of the Cardinal and his own anxiety for the union of Clarice with Lorenzo. To remove so formidable an impediment to his wishes as the presence of a rival to his daughter was a temptation that Jacopo could not resist; and the constant assurances of Borgia that it was against reason to hope for the accomplishment of a design, which was the dearest object of the ambition of Jacopo, while Melanthe remained an inmate of his palace, deadened any feelings of compunction which might otherwise have caused him to hesitate.

Thus all conspired to deprive Melanthe of the possibility of refuting the calumny of which she was the victim ; and such was the harshness with which she had been treated, that, having once boldly asserted her innocence, she scorned to have recourse to persuasion, where the simple truth, which was so much more in accordance with her nature, had failed. The besetting sin of Melanthe was pride ; but it was pride of a lofty nature, arising more from the consciousness of strict integrity of purpose and the belief of corresponding feelings in others, than from any desire of personal distinction. She would have exacted respect, yet was indifferent to submission or flattery ; and when conscious that she was not understood or appreciated, disdained to lower herself to the nature of ordinary mortals. At the same time that she was free from self-love, and humble as far as she was personally concerned, her mind was too full of scorn for all that was mean or vicious for one condemned to much intercourse with the world. Her ideas of mankind being derived more from her own imagination than from actual experience, she had at first established a standard of perfection by which she judged the

world ; and it was, therefore, not surprising that disappointment should ensue. These romantic impressions had been considerably strengthened by the accident of her having on her first entrance into life been thrown into contact with two men so remarkable for the very qualities she admired, as Montesecco and Lorenzo de' Medici. Both were noble-minded—generous, and of highly cultivated intellect ; and if the heart of Melanthe had decided in favour of the one, she was not the less ready to acknowledge the merit and endowments of the other.

She had yet to learn that all men were not as these, and too soon the vile machinations of Borgia had taught her suspicion. The conduct of Jacopo confirmed this impression, and a feeling of distrust sprung up in her heart, of which, till that moment, she would not have believed herself to have been capable. His cruelty aroused all the haughtiness of her nature.

“ Since they have condemned me, though innocent, I will depart in silence and in scorn of their injustice, and trust in heaven to clear my

name at some future day from the stain they have cast upon it."

With this exclamation, Melanthe, a few minutes after her interview with Lorenzo, had quitted the Orsini palace; and with feelings excited, by a consciousness of rectitude, to a stern dignity almost amounting to fierceness, she once again returned to the dwelling of Hassan. With what altered sensations did she re-enter the gates which led to her home—the only home she had ever known; and he, to whom she owed this and all other blessings, how her heart swelled, as she thought of him, who would now return to find the child of his adoption driven from the house of her oldest friends, a desolate and degraded being! It was a bitter thought; and though to Hassan alone she could look for support or defence, Melanthe shrunk from the dread of publicity to which her conduct would be necessarily exposed, when his anger was aroused against her persecutors. What, if the dreadful tale should reach the ear of Montesecco? Alas! when this fear first broke upon her mind, then did Melanthe feel the full misery of her position. Not

that she imagined that he would believe her guilty. Oh, no! she was conscious that every feeling of her mind was too well known to him: but she recollected how she had suffered when he had been accused; and the tears fell from her eyes as she thought of the bitter grief with which he would hear of the accusation against her.


The feelings of Melanthe softened as she dwelt upon the image of Montesecco; and revived by the spirit of reliance which entered into her heart as she called to mind the constant devotion of his manner, and the fervent assurance of his love, the moment before their cruel separation, she felt she was not alone upon the earth, and resolved to exert all her fortitude in enduring with patience the sorrow that had fallen upon her.

She hoped Hassan would soon return; and till then she determined not to quit the house, which was now her only refuge. Soothed by these reflections, she drew near her home. The first object that met her view was the figure of Gennaro; and her heart smote her as she marked the deep dejection which his countenance and attitude portrayed. He did not see her as she entered the room—his

eyes were vacantly turned to a window which opened upon the terrace above the river ; but Melanthe perceived that the tears which had fallen were yet upon his cheek, and that cheek was very pale. Poor boy, cut off from all communion with mankind, his thoughts were too often his sole companion, and that during her absence they had been sad, was now but too evident to Melanthe. She reproached herself with selfishness and neglect, and yet it had not been her fault that he had been left alone at the villa of Hassan ; but it was not at all times in her power to control the wilful spirit of the Greek boy. From the day she had entered the Orsini palace, he had resolutely refused to stir from his home, and pity for his infirmity generally caused his lightest wish to be respected. He had been thus left to solitude, and Melanthe, satisfied with continual inquiries respecting his health, had not returned to seek him. That he had pined in her absence she perceived too plainly ; and stung with remorse for her unkind forgetfulness, she resolved to atone for it by future care, and immediately crossed the room towards the spot where he sat, and held out her hand to him.

But she was unprepared for the violence of the emotion with which her presence seemed to affect him, and the smile vanished from her lips to give place to a deadly paleness, as she beheld the frantic joy of Gennaro, and the passionate gestures of delight, which, by their extravagance, too well expressed the grief he had suffered.

Brought up together, and several years his senior, Melanthe had been too much accustomed to look upon Gennaro as a child; and it was not until she felt the burning kisses with which he covered her hands, and beheld the agony of joy which her presence occasioned, that she recollected the base slanders which had been circulated concerning her intimacy with him; and the thought struck her that the affection of Gennaro might, perhaps, be of a warmer nature than she had imagined. She looked for a moment on the almost childish countenance of the boy—he was, in fact, a child, with all its impulses—a thing made up of smiles and tears—of merriment and love. She smiled in bitter scorn as she gazed upon him; and he, mistaking the expression of her countenance, threw back his glossy curls, and laughed, and



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CHAPTER XX.

THE total extinction of hope which the words of Melanthe had conveyed to the heart of Lorenzo, left to him no other line of conduct, than that of endeavouring, by reason, to overcome a passion which had taken possession of his whole being, to the suspension of every other faculty. It will scarcely be supposed that, in the mind of a man not yet two-and-twenty, one, who besides being an ardent admirer of beauty, and peculiarly capable of appreciating the excellence of a character like that of Melanthe, this was to be accomplished without a severe struggle. The endeavour to conceal from those around him the grief which he suffered, was the commencement of the bitter task which he now imposed upon himself; and so far was it attended with success, that to all eyes, but those of one person, did he appear as usual. Clarice alone beheld the workings of his mind. Clarice, who herself was

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looked as to a model of perfection; and it was the kindly influence of this gentle and steady adherence to the friend of her childhood, that fell like balm upon the wounded spirit of Lorenzo, and won from him the first favourable opinion of the character of her, who thus alone stood up in defence of the accused.

The most consummate art could not have devised a means which would so surely have touched the heart of Lorenzo, as did the simple truth of this young and timid girl; and the tear that glistened as she raised her eyes to those of her father, and then turned them towards the now vacant place of Melanthe, as they took their seats at the board, over which presided the stern and implacable Jacopo, went far to remove the actual horror with which Lorenzo had hitherto contemplated the alliance thus hastily forced upon him. But even this could not reconcile him to the immediate step which he knew he was expected to take. To be obliged, while his heart bled from the severity of the wound so lately inflicted, to smile upon another, to frame words of tenderness which he felt would

expire upon his lips, and to feign an interest in arrangements to him replete with disgust, was an effort beyond his strength; and he resolved to trust to time for extrication from his embarrassing position. The day might come when, by reflection and determination, he might so far subdue his regret as to make the sacrifice demanded of him: but now it was impossible—the tomb of his dearest hope was scarcely closed—would the ashes from its urn be a meet offering to a new love? Lorenzo shuddered at the thought; and Clarice, who read as if by intuition every feeling of his breast, withdrew herself yet more and more from his society and observation, with a delicacy for which she little knew how fervently Lorenzo blessed and admired her.

Not so Jacopo. The silence of Lorenzo not only disappointed his expectation, but, from its continuance, assumed the appearance of an intentional slight towards the family. The pride of the Orsini had taken alarm. It was no uncommon occurrence in that age for persons to be affianced by their parents; and having been informed of it,

allowed to advance or postpone the period of their marriage according to their own wishes, and sometimes this was done to an indefinite time.

In the case of Lorenzo, however, the matter was too important to be treated in an ordinary manner. Every day had Jacopo, wrapped up in his dignity, and inflamed with the additional importance which the proposal of Piero de' Medici had conferred, awaited a communication from Lorenzo, and looked forward with delight to the time when he should have the happiness of laying before his illustrious visitor proofs of the unblemished glory of the Orsini descent—their power, and influence in Rome; the extent of their connections with foreign princes; and the manifest advantage, as well as distinction, of obtaining the hand of the fairest daughter of their house. The vanity and pride of the old man revelled in the idea of the gratification which was in store for him; and, in anticipation of the delicious moment, he laid aside his usual stateliness, and bowed with servile humility to every fancy or opinion of his new son-in-law; while secretly he congratulated himself on having removed the

only obstacle to his wishes by the dismissal of the unfortunate Melanthe.

Still Lorenzo observed a most profound silence with regard to the expected subject; and though so young he was a man upon whose private opinions, even the self-sufficient Jacopo did not deem it safe to intrude. Day after day he endured all the tortures of suspense, and the pang of wounded pride; and bitterly did he in secret deplore his own disappointment, while he saw not that the gentle heart of Clarice was sinking with regret, and apprehension of dislike from him to whom she had secretly given her affections. Jacopo fancied that he loved his

Clarice and Lorenzo. More than once, he resolved to break through the customary usages, and himself open the communication with Lorenzo ; but it needed only a glance towards the calm and determined brow of the young Florentine to convince the conscious Jacopo, that his haste would be in vain ; for that Lorenzo would neither be led nor controlled, but would act from the result of his own reflection. And so Jacopo, chafing with pride and impatience, was constrained to remain an inactive spectator of all that passed before him.

One morning he was sitting in his own apartment, a prey to the irritation of disappointment, when he was startled by the sound of horses' feet and the clang of armour beneath his windows. It was early in the day, and at the hour when the great heat generally forbade all exercise of a military nature. The curiosity of Jacopo was aroused, and, rising from his sofa, he wrapped his loose robe of flowered silk closer round him ; and covering his thin grey hairs with a small velvet cap, he prepared to take a look into the court below, to satisfy himself as to what was going forward. This was, however, no easy matter. Though

his windows opened towards the enclosure, yet they were at some height from the ground; and the palaces of the Italian nobles being at that time built for security, the massive wall entirely precluded all possibility of seeing into the court. Still the clamour increased; and Jacopo, who, like any person in constant expectation of an important event long deferred, had grown nervously sensitive, and, ready to magnify the least unusual occurrence into one of fearful consequence, could not resist the anxiety which had taken possession of his mind to discover the cause of the more than ordinary bustle which reigned in the palace.

Quitting his apartment, he hastened along a corridor which led to the square turret overhanging the gateway, and mounting some rude steps, in order to reach the loop hole, he looked down into the court. The vague fears which had latterly flitted across his mind, seemed now to have been suddenly realized; and the thin cheek of Jacopo blanched as he gazed from his hiding place, and saw the Florentine escort which had accompanied Lorenzo to Rome, ranged in front of the portico which led to the private apartments

assigned to him ;—not indeed arrayed for sport or holiday, but each soldier and war horse equipped in the light armour, without which the followers of a chief of that age never dared to travel to any distance. The sight appeared to freeze the blood of the old noble, and he stood bending down with his hands upon his knees, and his eyes strained to catch the smallest movement of the soldiers. From the place of his concealment he could only see the side of the square opposite to that upon which he stood ; and, to his amazement and dismay, in a few moments he beheld Lorenzo himself, also armed and equipped for a journey, descend the steps of the portico ; and, at a sign from one of his attendants, his charger was led to the spot.

“ Is it possible ? How ?—he is going - - - And Clarice—and the marriage - - - ” gasped Jacopo. “ And the Orsini—is it thus they are treated ? ” And the old man’s voice was choked with rage. “ Yes, thus—and by whom ? by an upstart citizen ! —citizens—merchants, after all, nothing more,—base-born merchants—bankers—Jews ! ” he exclaimed, raising his voice almost to a shriek, as he uttered what in his impotent rage he deemed were

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house of the Medici—the son of Piero ! the grandson of the illustrious Cosmo !—the future head of the republic of Florence ! And he will be my son—the husband of Clarice ! All Europe will ring with the news. How the Colonnas will chafe, when they hear that a daughter of the Orsini has carried off the prize—a greater prize than most princes ; but I must hasten, or he will have reached my chamber before me. Yes, surely he comes to announce the marriage. Before night, his Holiness the Pope will have heard of it. How steep are these steps - - - there—there—now let me hasten to meet him.” And Jacopo, who, during these reflections, had been cautiously descending the rugged stairs, up which in the excitement of his curiosity he had clambered without perceiving their extreme steepness, now drew his cap more firmly over his brows, and gathering up his flowing robe, actually ran with all the speed he could command, the whole length of the corridor which separated him from the apartment in which he expected to find Lorenzo.

The compromise of dignity with interest is to an ordinary mind one of little difficulty ; and

Jacopo, in his eagerness to secure the rich and powerful Lorenzo for his son-in-law, forgot, that a moment before he had lavished upon him and his family every epithet of degradation which anger could devise. Breathless with haste and anxiety, Jacopo arrived at the door of his chamber. He threw it open—his wishes had not deceived him—Lorenzo was there. His appearance, however, spoke not of bridal promises or of joy. His face was very pale; he held an open letter, and Jacopo perceived that the hand which extended it towards him as he entered, trembled violently. Jacopo took the letter. The cause of all he had seen was soon explained. A few words from his brother

which overwhelmed him, he again took the fatal letter, and read it over, as if in the hope that some more favourable construction might yet be put upon the words. In silence he perused it, for Jacopo, like all persons wholly occupied with themselves, could not sufficiently control the violence of his disappointment to enable him to frame words of interest suitable to the occasion, and therefore wisely refrained from attempting to administer any comfort to his suffering guest. In a few moments Lorenzo spoke again. "I must depart—and instantly; but first I would offer to you my fervent thanks for the kindness and hospitality with which you welcomed me—a stranger to your city - - -"

"Nay, speak not of it, I pray," said Jacopo, who was better versed in courtly compliments and dissimulation than in the gentle art of soothing the sorrowful, "we have but poorly shown the high honour in which we hold your person and your house. The Medici, and the Orsini, have ever been friends; and much do we lament the grief that now overshadows the dwelling of those so dear to our hearts!"

" I thank you, Prince, from my heart," replied Lorenzo. " There is yet a favour I would beg."

" You have only to speak, to be obeyed," said Jacopo, fully expecting that his daughter's name was about to be mentioned.

" I have remarked, of late," replied Lorenzo, " that his Holiness has returned but cold answers to the various demands I have been called upon to make in the name of the City of Florence ; I would have him made aware of the urgent sorrow which summons me hence, ere I can lay my homage at his feet."

" It shall be done," said Jacopo ; " I will immediately seek the Cardinal, who will carry your message to the Pope."

" I thank you," replied Lorenzo, " and now—farewell !"

" Have you no other business ?" asked Jacopo, startled from his usual caution by the hurry of the moment. " My daughter ! - - -"

" Commend me to the Lady Clarice," said Lorenzo hastily, " and entreat her that she remember me in her prayers—for the desolate—and unhappy !" More he could not say ; for with the

name of Clarice another arose to his lips which he did not dare to utter : he turned away, and left the disappointed Jacopo standing alone in his chamber ; and whole ages of sorrow seemed to roll over the heart of Lorenzo as his thoughts reverted with agony to Melanthe, from whom he now felt as if again separated—and for ever !

CHAPTER XXI.

THE news of the departure of Lorenzo for Florence, and of the dangerous illness of Piero, produced various effects upon those in Rome who were opposed to the power of the Medici. Some looked upon it as a fatal blow to the hopes they had entertained of being able to subvert the authority of the family ; while others considered it only as a step gained towards the total extinction of the race they detested. As yet, no decided plan had been agreed upon amongst the conspirators. Contending interests made it a difficult matter to arrange ; but where the general object was of such vital importance, it soon became obvious that, if success was to be hoped for, some sacrifice of individual wishes must be effected.

Strange as it may appear to those who have formed a different idea of the imperative nature of the duties and uprightness belonging to the station

of him who was denominated "Father of the Church," the whole body of malcontents did not number one amongst them, whose virulence and determination to annihilate the family of the Medici equalled that of him, whose words should have been those of charity and peace. From the day in which, at his secret council table, he had listened to the proposal of murder, from the lips of Francesco de' Pazzi, Sixtus had been most active in the furtherance of every scheme which might carry their purpose into effect. The inflexible hatred of the Pope was the rallying point of the conspirators. In this Sixtus was not, as they had at first imagined, solely actuated by the fear of the growing power of the Medici. Views of a private nature lent their aid, and revenge of a fancied insult to one of his race, conspired to fan into flame the hatred to the Florentine rulers, which had long smouldered in his bosom. Notwithstanding his vow of celibacy, Sixtus had several sons, whom, under the false appellation of nephews, he endeavoured to advance in the world. His favourite was Girolamo Riario, upon whom he had bestowed the title of Count, and for whom he had lavished immense sums in the

purchase of various estates. The Duchy of Imola had been bought from the family of the Manfredi for forty thousand ducats; and soon after, Forlì was added to the possessions of the Count. Yet all this was not sufficient to satisfy the grasping avarice of Girolamo; and he soon persuaded Sixtus to add the city of Castello to the territories with which he had already invested him. This, however, was not so easy of accomplishment. To possess himself of the city, as he had already done in some other cases, by the force of arms, was the first intention of the Pope; yet, to his surprise, he not only experienced stout resistance from the possessor, Nicolo Vitelli, but found that several of the neighbouring states lent their aid in his defence; and although unable to cope with a force so superior as that which Sixtus had assembled against him, yet succeeded by their efforts in procuring honourable terms for the city, which, at length, was obliged to capitulate.

Amongst those who had taken the most active part in the assistance afforded to the sovereign of Castello, were the rulers of the Florentine republic, who, besides the support due to a friend and ally,

had not seen without uneasiness the approach of the army of the Pope to the frontiers of their own territory. The indignation of Sixtus at thus finding the interests of a petty state preferred to the accomplishment of his wishes, was the more violent as present policy did not allow him openly to display his anger. But the insult had never been forgotten ; and for years it had rankled in his breast, ever urging him to take a signal revenge upon the instigators of the measure. The time appeared now at hand ; and, in anticipation of the services which might be required from Girolamo, should it be found that his co-operation was necessary, Sixtus had bestowed a cardinal's hat on the young Raffaele Riario, the eldest son of Girolamo, and who was a student at the University of Pisa. To such ends were, at that time, the highest offices in the church devoted.

The intelligence of the sudden departure of Lorenzo was by no means so perplexing to the Pope as to some of his accomplices. Sixtus had too much at heart the temporal glory of the station he occupied, not to be aware that any barefaced attempt upon the life of Lorenzo while he might

be accounted his guest, would be an indelible stain upon the honour and dignity of the Papal crown; and it was to him almost a relief when the accident of Piero's illness removed Lorenzo to a distance. If not quite so practicable, it was at least safer to carry on machinations against him while at Florence; and it was with a grim smile of satisfaction, that the old man listened to the words of Luca Pitti, as he detailed the account of the danger of Piero, which he had learned from Jacopo Orsini.

"A good thing!—a good thing!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands as he spoke. "There will be one the fewer to get rid of."

"Yes; but your Holiness will please to remember, that this sudden event will be the means of placing Lorenzo at once at the head of the republic—he will make friends - -"

"And also enemies," observed Sixtus, lifting his cunning eyes to the face of Luca Pitti. "Intoxicated with power, he will observe no moderation, and it will be easy to enlist on our side those whom, in the first instance, he will disgust by an abrupt denial of their claims. The body of malcontents, I am told, gathers strength every day."

"It has done so," replied Luca Pitti, "during the absence of Lorenzo; for Piero, reduced by the violence of his disorder, is utterly incapable of action; and Giuliano is but a boy. If we could have kept Lorenzo another month in Rome, we should have managed to have matured our plans more fully."

"Could not the bright eyes of some of our Roman ladies have effected this?" inquired Sixtus, with a laugh.

"None," replied Luca Pitti; "no matron or damsel of Rome could win so much as a smile from him. He had eyes and ears but for one, and Melanthe - - -"

"Ha!" interrupted Sixtus, "Melanthe! the same who won the heart of Montesecco."

"The same," replied Luca Pitti; "the daughter of Hassan."

"Truly this maiden must boast of no common charms, since she thus enslaves the bravest and the greatest amongst our youth. And how fared the suit of the young Florentine?" inquired the Pope, who was never more agreeably employed than in listening to the account of a love tale.

“ It would seem but poorly,” replied Luca Pitti, “ for she suddenly quitted the Orsini palace, and has since remained a close prisoner in the house of Hassan.”

“ I thought that Hassan was absent,” said the Pope.

“ He is so, and that makes her conduct the more extraordinary. That girl,” continued Luca Pitti, angrily, “ is ever on my path, to mar the fairest projects. Her beauty well nigh drew from me the love of Montesecco ; and now, had she smiled upon Lorenzo, even for a few weeks, our enterprise might have been completed.”

“ Nay,” said the Pope, doggedly, “ I have said it before, the blood of the Medici shall not be shed in Rome - - and besides, where had been the use of leaving Giuliano to avenge his brother ?”

“ His death might have followed—would have followed,” replied Luca Pitti ; “ and now, by transferring the scene of our actions to Florence, we have an enemy upon the spot more difficult to subdue than the Medici themselves.”

“ Of whom do you speak ?” inquired Sixtus.

“ Of old Jacopo de’ Pazzi, the head of the

family. Could we gain him, our success is certain. At his villa of Montughī, the Medici are constant guests; it would need only a well chosen moment to accomplish all. A feast—a wedding—and, in the confusion of the hour, who could name the hand that gave the blow?"

"Ha! by the Saints! well thought of," exclaimed the Pope, with most unholy glee; "it must be done."

"Ay, but how?" asked Luca Pitti, gloomily. "Jacopo de' Pazzi, alone of the family, adheres to the Medici; he is old and timid, and what weak men call conscientious, and would hesitate while he should perform."

"He must be bought," said Sixtus, calmly.

"Impossible," replied Luca Pitti. "He is already rich beyond his desire; he - - -"

"My friend," interrupted the Pope, "Four-score years have almost passed over this head—it needed but a few, a very few of them to be numbered with the past, ere I learned the truth that has ever given me power over man. All are alike venal. One may talk of conscience, another of honour, while the next holds out the ties of grati-

tude, or the blessing of independence. I listen, but mock at their self-delusion, for all are alike accessible. The difference is only in the mode. Say, where thinkest thou is the weak point of this Jacopo de' Pazzi, whose countenance thou judgest so necessary?"

"The restoration of his family to the rights and honours they formerly enjoyed in Florence, is his dearest hope," replied Luca Pitti.

"Said I not there was a road to his heart?" exclaimed the Pope, delightedly; "we must send some one to sound him. Why not depute his kinsman, Francesco, to carry our secret message?"

"Francesco has been cooler of late," replied Luca Pitti, "since your Holiness refused to bestow upon him the post which he so much coveted."

"The office of our treasurer," said Sixtus; "the very office with which we had invested Lorenzo upon his arrival in Rome."

"The very reason why Francesco de' Pazzi, his mortal enemy, would have seen him stripped of the honour. He had long coveted the office; to give it to a Medici was a direct affront to himself."

"It shall be done," said the Pope, after a few

moments deliberation. "We will dismiss Lorenzo, and bestow his place upon Francesco. We look for success—we must not be over-scrupulous about the means."

"It is a bold step," observed the cautious Luca Pitti.

"And therefore will lull all suspicion of our connivance at more secret measures," replied the cunning Sixtus, who instantly perceived the cover which any open enmity with the Medici would afford.

"Tell Francesco that the office of treasurer is his own; and bid him immediately repair to Florence, nor quit it until the consent of Jacopo de' Pazzi be gained," added the Pope, rising, and assuming the air of authority he had laid aside during the early part of his conversation; and Luca Pitti bowed, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE first days of the retirement of Melanthe were full of unmitigated misery. The keenness of the blow which had fallen upon her had produced a stunning sensation, which, for a time, suspended her faculties, and she could scarcely believe in the reality of her situation. It is so difficult for a young fresh heart to imagine the wickedness and

Secure in the innocence and pride of her heart, she had not always consulted the formal precision which was customary with unmarried females of her rank ; and the independence which, from the uncontrolled liberty permitted to her by the fondness of Hassan, had become a habit, she now felt would have been better exchanged for a more secluded existence. From a retrospect of other days Melanthe turned to the present ; and she immediately perceived that the position into which she had been forced by the suddenness of her expulsion from the Orsini palace, was one totally incompatible with prudence.

Hassan was still absent—an absence which appeared so unusually protracted, that a vague sense of uneasiness with regard to him began to oppress her mind. His return was a moment almost equally dreaded and desired by her ; but of that return she had as yet received no tidings. His anxiety to discover the retreat of Elphenor had frequently led him into many similar excursions ; and at first, therefore, she had not been alarmed, especially as a message had been delivered to her from him, of a nature to allay all apprehension ;

but when day after day passed by and brought no other news of the traveller, her fears returned; and she resolved to seek some other counsel than her own as to the propriety of remaining so long in the house of Hassan with no other companion than Gennaro.

Poor Gennaro! from the day on which his mute declaration of the affection which filled his young heart had been so chillingly received by Melanthe, he had scarcely dared to approach her, but wandered about with a forlorn and anxious air, which pierced the hearts of those who looked upon him. The nature of the boy appeared suddenly changed. His former amusements had become distasteful to him; and he, whose tread was once as gay and light as the sportive course of the butterfly, now moved about with a slow and heavy step—his arms folded on his breast; and too often the eyes, which used to sparkle with a brightness almost unearthly, were filled with tears. The sorrow which cannot vent itself in words, or seek relief from sympathy, is ever the most difficult to bear; and the silent grief of the poor dumb boy soon stole the roses from his cheek, and the glad smile from his lip.

The heart of Melanthe ached as she gazed upon him, and marked the change which sorrow had wrought in his appearance. Careful, neither by look nor deed, to encourage a feeling of which she was unwilling even to acknowledge to herself the existence, she avoided his society as much as possible, thus depriving herself of her only companion. But this could not prevent her observing the deep hold which his passion had taken on the mind of the boy. Often would Melanthe, although concealed from his view, follow every movement and action of Gennaro, and see, with regret, that but one thought actuated them all. She would mark him, as he sat in the spot now chosen as his own, because it had once been her's, when, unconscious that any eye was upon him, he would draw from his bosom various trifling articles of which he had possessed himself, and which Melanthe knew to have been her own; press them to his lips, and to his heart, kissing them fondly, as had been his wont, when, in days of more unrestrained friendship, Melanthe used to give her hand to his childish caresses; and then hurriedly restore the treasures he had hoarded to their usual

hiding place, and look fearfully round, lest any one might have come within view during his stolen moments of happiness.

These and many other silent demonstrations of the love within his heart, were visible to the watchful eye of Melanthe ; and, as she beheld the symptoms of an affection which had grown up without her knowledge or desire, her heart naturally turned to thoughts both of him she loved, and of him whose love she had so lately rejected. She looked upon the grief of Gennaro, and remembering the agony of sorrow with which Lorenzo had heard the rejection of his suit, she thought of Montesecco—the beloved, the idolized of her heart, and she asked herself if he loved her as either of these had done? It is a folly to compare the affection of those who love us with that of him whom our own heart has preferred. The consciousness of the sacrifices we would gladly make for his sake, leads us to expect more than the utmost devotion can give. From expecting, we come to exacting, and then arise the unreasonable comparisons our self-love is ever ready to draw.

Melanthe, as she first admitted the dangerous

thought of comparing the love of Montesecco with that of others, experienced a bitter sensation of misery. But soon her generous nature triumphed over the fear which had begun to steal over her. She recollected the peculiarity of the position in which he was placed, one which precluded the possibility of his immediately returning to seek her ; she recollected the scroll which he had left, and which doubtless contained the assurance of his faith ! moreover, she remembered the many acts of kindness, the words of love he had spoken ; and, as she thought of them, her cheek crimsoned with delight, and her heart filled with regret for the slight suspicion her passing thoughts had cast upon his sincerity.

The more Melanthe dwelt upon the love of Montesecco, the more she considered it an imperative duty to shield a name so dear to him from all suspicion ; and she felt that after the imputation which had been cast upon her, to remain longer alone was objectionable. But where to go was the question ? Disowned by the Orsini, the friends of her youth, she dared not to claim protection from any other of the noble families in Rome ; and

kinsmen of her own, she had none. In this dilemma, her only resource was to return to the convent where she had passed so many years, and there, stating her forlorn condition, implore the protection of the Abbess, until the return of Hassan should restore her to his care. Having determined upon this step, Melanthe lost no time in putting it into execution; and leaving her house for the first time since she had returned from the Orsini palace, she took her way to the convent.

Since she had last entered its walls, what vicissitudes of life had she not experienced! She had quitted the convent, peaceful and happy, only to entangle herself in the mazes of the labyrinth of love! For a moment sunshine was upon her path, but the cloud of sorrow gathered, and darkness fell around her, shutting out the beacon of joy. Exposed as she was on all sides, what new trials might she not have to undergo! She thought of the love of Lorenzo—of poor Gennaro, and then a shudder passed over her, as she remembered the accusation which had left her friendless, and the hated name of Borgia rose to her mind.

The idea lent speed to her steps, and she hastened forward until she reached the gate of the convent. No earthborn fear of rejection stayed her hand, as she opened the wicket. She was entering the house of those who, in dedicating themselves to God, had remembered that he said, "he would have mercy and not sacrifice;" and she knew that even had she sinned, she would still be welcome there as one who repented. Nor was she disappointed. The Abbess heard her tale with true christian forbearance. Nothing was concealed by Melanthe, except her suspicion of the part which the Cardinal Borgia had played, and his identity with the Padre Anselmo, from whom, during her former residence at the convent, she had been in the habit of receiving instruction. She openly confessed her love for Montesecco, and her determination never to become the wife of another; and when her spirits had become composed, she could not forbear smiling, as the good sisters with whom she had ever been a favourite, crowded around her, each adding her exhortation to that which had been given by her predecessor, in order to induce Melanthe to

promise that she never again would venture forth into the wicked world, but seek tranquillity within their peaceful walls. Melanthe thanked them—with words—even with tears of grateful affection ; but she could not promise obedience.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE sensations of Melanthe, on again establishing herself as a visitor at the convent, were overpowering. So keen was her delight in the certainty of protection, that for the first few days after her arrival, her mind actually revelled in repose. Her only present anxiety was caused by incessant watching for the return of Hassan. Each day, a messenger was dispatched to the house ; but Hassan did not arrive, and each day the heart of Melanthe filled with sorrow, as she saw poor Gennaro, after having deposited his daily offering of flowers at the gate of the convent, retrace his mournful steps to that home which was now doubly desolate to him.

Still Melanthe remained firm in her determination of not quitting the convent ; and the kindness of the abbess was constantly exerted to render her stay as comfortable as possible. The cells allotted to such as were mere boarders, or visitors,

were many degrees better than those with which the holy sisters contented themselves. That which Melanthe occupied was the same which had been devoted to her use during former years; and as, by the permission of the abbess, she had caused many of her own things to be brought from the house of Hassan, before long her little room presented an appearance of comfort and neatness of arrangement which called forth repeated expressions of wonder and admiration from the simple women, who, during their secluded lives, had passed their days happily without even the suspicion of the luxuries enjoyed by others. They were never weary of questioning Melanthe as to what she had seen during her stay in the great world. The glories of the palaces, the description of the dresses, the gaiety of the hunting parties, the dances, the masques, the fireworks, horse races, and fights between wild beasts;—all was new to them—all was delightful; and they listened to the accounts which she detailed for their gratification with a delight almost childish, but free from envy, or any feeling of discontent at being cut off from similar enjoyments. The dull routine of their conventual

existence seemed to have brought with it a feeling which, perhaps, it was intended it should inspire—a total blunting of sensibility; and the poor nuns, whilst they listened to Melanthe, indulged in no other remains of worldly weakness, save that of curiosity, and afterwards returned contentedly to their monotonous avocations.

But Melanthe, much as she enjoyed the repose vouchsafed to her, felt the disinclination she had always experienced for a conventual life, every day increase; and when the good abbess constantly endeavoured, by gentle reasoning, to prove its superiority over every other state of existence, Melanthe shuddered at the idea of the living grave to which she would lure her. To one of her intellect, the prison of the mind which the convent presented, was a picture more formidable by many degrees than that of the body; and narrow as was her cell, it was nothing to the narrowness that hemmed in her soul, as she listened to the conversation of those, who appeared to think that the most acceptable offering to Heaven, is a state of negative existence upon earth.

A short time sufficed to restore the tranquillity

of Melanthe, but it was not destined to endure. One morning she was sitting alone in her cell, and her spirit was less firm than it had hitherto been. Her messenger had just returned, and still no news from Hassan had reached his dwelling. The hour in which this same answer had for so many days met the ear of Melanthe, was ever one of sadness, and this day when again disappointment had fallen upon her, she felt more acutely than usual that the protracted absence of Hassan was unnatural, and a presentiment of evil fell upon her spirit. Her thoughts reverted to all that had occurred, and a deep gloom settled upon her mind as the recollection of the Cardinal made her tremble. Could she have disconnected his image from her woes, they had seemed lightened of half their load; but a secret conviction that he was the cause of all pressed upon her, and in vain she strove to shake off the belief. The cruel words of Luca Pitti, which had effected the sudden separation from Montesecco, were even ascribed by Melanthe to the influence of Borgia, though, much as he rejoiced at their effect, he had been innocent of their suggestion.

As Melanthe thought of this, her heart grew yet more bitter against the author of her misfortunes; and she began to question the prudence with which she had hitherto refrained from making known to any one the persecution to which his odious passion had subjected her. But, alas! the time had gone by when such a step had been possible. To whom could she now reveal a secret of so disgraceful a nature? The good Abbess could not even protect her, for the Cardinal was all powerful; and had it been otherwise, Melanthe shrunk from the idea of polluting the ear of the pure and timid votary of heaven with a tale so horrible and profane. She shrunk even from herself, as she thought with terror whether it could have been possible that she had ever unwittingly encouraged such degradation, as she felt the love of Borgia to be: but here her conscience came to her support, and lifting her bowed head, while her cheeks glowed with shame from the scrutiny which she had thus been forced to make of all her past intercourse with one so depraved, she sunk upon her knees before the crucifix suspended in her cell, and fervently prayed that she might henceforth be

saved from the pollution of further communication with him.

It seemed as though her words had summoned to her presence the form she so much dreaded. Scarcely had she risen from her knees, when a heavy step sounded on her ear, and the next moment Borgia stood before her. But he came not in his wonted state. His robe of pride was thrown aside; his gorgeous attendants waited not now upon his steps; and all the splendour with which he had often hoped to dazzle the eyes of her whose destruction he secretly compassed, was now exchanged for the loose frock and deep cowl of a poor Franciscan friar, concealing as effectually the

that way ; for it did not form part of the system by which the Cardinal hoped one day to possess himself of his victim, to make use of any restraint or violence towards her. To carry her off at once would have been an exploit at that time attended with little difficulty and less danger ; but the Cardinal was far too much of a sensualist to be satisfied with a triumph so easily obtained. His manner towards Melanthe had ever been one of respectful adoration ; and though he had not scrupled to insult her by declarations of a love which in one of his calling never could be sanctified by marriage, yet it had always been conveyed in the most courtly strain, as if fearful to offend the modesty he so much admired.

For the nature of Borgia, reckless and profligate as it was, had in it so much of refinement, added to a penetration seldom equalled, that the fine qualities of Melanthe were not lost upon him ; and perhaps it was this very superiority over the ordinary character of other women, quite as much as the rare beauty of her person, that first inflamed his sated fancy, and inspired him with the idea of making himself loved by her whom he so ardently

admired. The repugnance with which she had always listened to his words, by no means damped his hopes. With the extent of his power he knew her to be unacquainted, and he hoped that time and assiduity would remove any impression which she might have formed against him. Ignorant of the strength of her affection for Montesecco, he calculated that absence and the difficulty of communication would soon remove a passing fancy; and the account of Luca Pitti, as well as the words which he himself had read upon the scroll so insidiously abstracted from Mariana, left him reason to suppose that no engagement of a serious nature existed between the object of his affections, and the Condottiere.

The devotion of Lorenzo to Melanthe had been a source of extreme anxiety to Borgia. He could scarcely conceive the possibility of any woman's rejecting an alliance so splendid; but the indifference of Melanthe soon became too obvious to remain unperceived by any person except one who was blinded by his own hopes; and the Cardinal had merely devised the infamous plan of accusation, which had so foully prospered, in order to

deprive her of the protection of the Orsini ; a protection too powerful to admit of his prosecuting his schemes with the freedom he desired. Now, when he beheld how all his wickedness had succeeded, how did he rejoice in the invention ; and when was added the intelligence of the retreat of the unhappy girl into the convent, his heart bounded with exultation ; for Melanthe, in the convent, was more helpless and accessible than in the house of Hassan, where, in the fear of some premature discovery taking place, the Cardinal had lately forbore to intrude.

Now all danger was removed ; and Borgia, after a few days had passed, which he hoped might have the effect of making the miseries of her future position still more apparent to her, took his way to the convent, to which, in the assumed character of Confessor, he had long had free access. The duties, which were always irksome, never had appeared to him so intolerable as on that day. It seemed as if every nun in the convent had, purposely to occupy his time, committed what in the innocence of their hearts they called most heinous sins. To wearisome tales, and long-drawn confes-

sions, was the impatient Cardinal forced to listen, until his brain reeled with the irritation they caused him: but at length they came to an end; and having distributed with a lavish hand penances and fastings of different degrees among the trembling sisters, he quitted the Confessional, and made the best of his way to the spot where his impatience would long since have carried him, had he dared to pass through the Convent without the semblance at least of having performed some of his duties.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“HEAVEN’S blessing be upon thee, my daughter!” said the Cardinal, addressing Melanthe in the form of his sacred character. “Having learned that thy mind was full of anxiety for the safety of Hassan, thy father by adoption, I have come to try and minister some comfort to thee.”

“Thanks, Reverend Father!” replied Melanthe, meekly folding her hands upon the breast, which only throbbed with more terror at what she knew to be an hypocritical salutation; “my troubles are indeed many, and my anxiety is great.”

“Without reason,” observed the Cardinal calmly; “at the appointed time, Hassan will return.”

There was something in the tone in which these words were said, that made Melanthe tremble; and hoping, by showing her unwillingness to prolong the conversation, that she might at least confine

it to ordinary topics, she merely bowed her head, and remained silent.

“Is it permitted for me to inquire,” said Borgia blandly, “the reason why I find thee in this place, instead of enjoying the festivities of the Orsini palace?”

“I am here by my own wish,” said Melanthe, colouring at the evasion she imagined herself forced to practise. “The lady Abbess is my friend, and will protect me.”

“Scarcely so well as a Prince of the Orsini,” replied Borgia, unable to repress a look of malevolent triumph, which fortunately was unnoticed by Melanthe.

“In the house of God, none need protection from the world without.”

“True,” answered Borgia with an incredulous smile, “the sanctity of the convent is inviolable. Still, methinks it were not overpleasing to Hassan to learn that thou hadst quitted the palace of his friend with such an unkind appearance of haste.”

“I will myself inform him of the reason,” said Melanthe.

The unmanly triumph of taunting her with a

disgrace, which she believed to have been the work of his own hand, was fast arousing the indignation which at first she had resolved to suppress.

“ And why wilt thou not confide in me ?” asked Borgia gently ; “ dost thou estimate my friendship at so low a rate, or hast thou forgotten that, in other days, here, in this very cell, I have listened to thy confession ? In those days, thou thoughtest me a friend - - - ”

“ Because in those days I believed thee one, and knew not that the great Cardinal Borgia would stoop to the office of the poor Padre Anselmo, for the sake of abusing a helpless maiden’s confidence.”

“ How have I abused thy confidence ?” asked Borgia, enchanted to have provoked an accusation, which might make Melanthe depart from the cold stateliness of tone in which she had hitherto addressed him.

“ Hast thou not - - - ” she replied, but immediately added, “ but words are idle—and I would fain be alone - - - ” and rising from her seat without lifting her eyes to those of the Cardinal, she attempted to reach the door of her cell ; but the

form of Borgia instantly interposed itself, and Melanthe shrunk back in disgust.

“With all respect,” said the Cardinal, “I would crave thy presence yet a while, were it only in remembrance of the days when within these very walls my coming was welcome to thee; thou hadst not then learned to arm thy brow with scorn, and thy lips with reproach, when words of kindness met thine ear.”

Melanthe felt the blood rush to her cheek, as the soft tone in which this was spoken, seemed to convey an insinuation from which her heart revolted; but disdaining to reply to it, she merely retired a few steps from the place where she stood.

“And that I cannot grant,” replied Borgia.
“No, Melanthe, sooner than leave thee, will I renounce the whole world. I live but in thy sight ; my midnight dream and waking thought is still of thee alone, and to win thy love - - -”

“Speak not to me of love,” interrupted Melanthe fiercely, “the very word is poison from thy lips, the air polluted by its sound ;—while I, the wretched object of a suit so foul, am sunk to infamy in my own eyes even for having listened to its breath.”

“Nay, calm thyself,” meekly replied the Cardinal, while he gazed with passionate admiration on the beauty of Melanthe, which, inflamed by scorn, shone with increased radiance as she stood erect before him. “Calm thyself, and let thy gentle heart frame some word more kind than infamy in speaking of my love.”


“No ! none more kind, nor less true ;” answered Melanthe, “unhallowed love is infamous !”

“Yes, if it were unhallowed,” said Borgia with assumed decorum ; “but the love I crave of thee is honourable before God and man, ’tis that of holy wedlock - - -”

"Wedlock! thou a priest—a Cardinal—would I could call thee holy," said Melanthe, with an air of such ineffable contempt, that Borgia actually winced beneath it.

"Thou forgettest that the power which makes can also unmake. There is no vow so binding but the Father of the Church can unloose at his will. When I ask thee, therefore, to be my wife, it is because I know such things are possible. Say but the word, and the next hour a dispensation from the Pope will prove to thee that the love of Borgia is no counterfeit."

"To be thy wife," said Melanthe, with a shud-



come a day, when all these will be as nothing ; and when thy hand, Melanthe, that now upon my knees I crave, shall wield the destinies of nations ; one day, the brows of Borgia will wear the Papal crown ; and thou, Melanthe, thou the loved, the adored of his heart - - -"

"Peace, monster of iniquity ! perjured before God and man," cried Melanthe, unable to repress her horror, as Borgia, throwing himself upon his knees before her, attempted to take her hand. "I tell thee, were thy false words true, and could the Holy Church annul those vows that bind thee to her, sooner would Melanthe be torn limb from limb than be the bride of such a one as thou."

"Thou lovest me not," said Borgia, in a tone of sorrow so deep and unfeigned, that it showed, amidst all his villainy, the dislike of Melanthe could touch his heart with real grief.

"Now, may just heaven, and all its blessed saints, bear witness to my words," said Melanthe, as, with the rapidity of light, she threw herself upon her knees before the crucifix suspended from the wall, and, raising her clasped hands above her head, exclaimed, "I hate thee with a hate as deadly,

as though thou wert some reptile whose very breath is death. Even thus I loathe thy presence—loathe myself for having listened to thy impious words. Begone,” she continued, as she rose from the ground, and with a gesture of proud contempt, pointed to the door. “Begone, ere heaven send down its wrath upon the wretch that thus, within the holy convent walls, has dared to brave the sanctity they bear, and mock the garb of Christ, by making it a cover for a sin so hideous!”

“Thou lovest another?” said Borgia, in a tone so calm, and with a manner so deliberate, that it offered a startling contrast to the violence of Melanthe.

The only answer he received was another impatient gesture from her, urging his departure; but his keen eye had marked the quivering lip of his victim, unable to repress the fear which shook her to the soul, as these words reached her ear.

“Thou lovest another,” repeated Borgia, yet more slowly, “and that other is—Montesecco!”

The word was like a spell. The eye of Melanthe fell; and though she moved not from the proud attitude she had assumed, yet the sudden

heaving of her breast, and the deep crimson of the blush which overspread her face, at once proved to Borgia that he was not mistaken; and that the feeling which he had striven to convince himself was but transient, had taken too deep a root to be easily effaced.

The cheek of Borgia reddened also. A feeling of pain so intense that, for a moment, he could not master it, sent the blood from his heart; but as the blush faded from his face, so did the dream of love from his mind, only to give place to visions of revenge. In such a breast as that of the Cardinal, the transition was instantaneous; no check had ever been placed upon his unbridled passions with impunity; and before the confusion of Melanthe had sufficiently passed away to suffer her to speak, the active imagination of Borgia had already devised the most exquisite torture which he could inflict upon those whose affection had so fatally interposed between him and the gratification of his unholy desires.

“Why should I hesitate to avow it?” said Melanthe, steadily raising her eyes to those of the

Cardinal, "Montesecco is, indeed, the chosen of my heart."

"Rash woman," said Borgia, bending a fiend-like glance upon her glowing countenance, "thou speakest as one who glories in her choice. How knowest thou that he is worthy of thy love?"

"Because I know his heart is above guile—because I know his lightest word is truth; and that within his breast no dishonourable thought ever yet found a resting place. Brave—honest—true. It is for this I love him—and glory in my love."

The sublime tenderness which lighted up the face of Melanthe, as she thus unshrinkingly bore witness to the noble qualities of Montesecco, filled

His heart is the only kingdom I desire ; and while it is my own, I fear not all that malice can desire, or misfortune inflict."

As Melanthe spoke, she had entirely regained her self-possession ; and the firmness and reliance upon the love which she so prized, proved to Borgia, that he had not mistaken the line of vengeance he intended to pursue. Coming up close to the side of Melanthe, who was diverted for the moment by her reflections, from the terror of her present position, he said, in a voice so low that its hoarse whisper was as the hissing of a serpent in her ear,

" Melanthe ! thou hast despised my love—scorned my power—and trampled upon the dearest hope that dwelt within my breast ; for I did love thee—madly doated on thee, and my pride would have been to place thee on a pinnacle of greatness no other woman has ever reached. This dream thou hast destroyed, and openly avowed thy love for another—for one, whom thou dost profess to honour as well as love. Melanthe, in so much is thy nature like my own that to love to agony—to madness, is common to us both. Thou hast but one

thought—to be the wife of Montesecco—speak,” he added almost furiously, “answer me, is it not so?”

“It is,” replied Melanthe steadily; and raising her eyes devoutly to Heaven, as though to register her words.

“To give to him,” continued Borgia, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion, “all that wild worship of the soul that I would have given to thee—to dwell upon his every look and word, until thy heart, dissolving in its love, loses all sense of being, save in him. Shrink not,” he added, as Melanthe, frightened by his vehemence, and the fierce passion of his looks, covered her blushing face with her hands. “Shrink not,” he continued.

tion he had cast upon the faith of her lover had wrung from the lips of Melanthe. "Thou hast defied it—but none ever did so with impunity. I tell thee again, the love on which thou leanest shall fail thee. The hour will come, when, kneeling at his feet, Montesecco shall spurn thee as the vilest of thy sex; when that hour comes, think of the power thou hast this day defied; think of Roderigo Borgia, and tremble!"

A shriek burst from the lips of Melanthe, when Borgia, his lips livid with passion, his eyes glaring upon her, as though they could pierce her to the soul, advanced slowly towards her, and seizing her arm as he pronounced the last words, held it forcibly for a moment.

"Fear not," said the Cardinal, with a contemptuous laugh as he relaxed his grasp, "thy life is safe; the revenge of Borgia aims at more noble ends; the poison that works quickly is but a coward's arm."

"Oh! my father," exclaimed Melanthe mournfully, "can it be that on the same earth with thee thy child is thus beset; and thou, Hassan, alas! where art thou? All—all—abandon me."

“ Melanthe spoke these words almost unconscious of the presence of Borgia ; and when his hateful voice again roused her attention, she gazed upon him with a look of bewilderment, as he said,

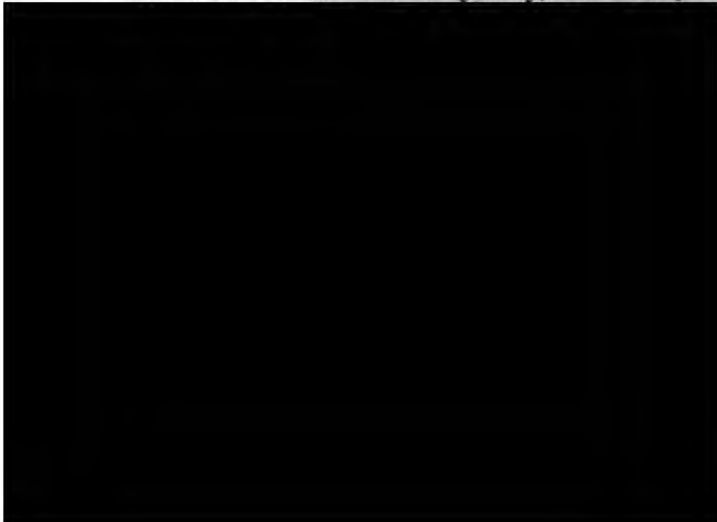
“ Yes, all ! and if they did not, thinkest thou the prisons of the Holy City have not yet a dungeon for such as would cross my path. Thy father's existence is a dream of thy brain ;—upon Hassan hast thou looked thy last ;—from the palace of the Orsini thou art an outcast ; and before yon sun has set, from these walls shalt thou be expelled. The world is before thee ; go, and wander upon its breast ; call its Princes to thy defence ; who will dare to meet the power of the Borgia ? to hide thee

CHAPTER XXV.

THE door closed upon the receding figure of the Cardinal, and Melanthe was again alone ; but the pride which had hitherto sustained her began to fail, as the fearful menaces of Borgia rung in her ears. Was it possible that such words could have been addressed to her ? and what was her crime ? The greatest crime a woman could commit towards the self love and arrogance of man. She had despised his love, and in her resistance to temptation, and neglect of worldly advancement, had proved herself superior to him. The disappointment of the passion he had conceived for Melanthe was even less keen in the bosom of Borgia than the sense of the withering contempt with which she had listened to his proposals. The rejection of the insidious scheme of a formal marriage, which

he well knew would have been eagerly adopted by any woman of less uncompromising integrity than Melanthe, left him no hope that any means of persuasion would prevail. Its failure convinced him that he had the more deeply exposed his villainy ; and, smarting under the consciousness of the contempt he had so justly incurred, he quitted the presence of Melanthe, with a determination of making her punishment as severe as it was possible. No touch of pity entered his heart, for that heart was without one sentiment of generosity ; and in such natures, revenge is the only solace for injury or disappointment.

His first act was one of tyranny, for which,



menace of vengeance. The hateful signature of Borgia revealed to her what was incomprehensible to the Abbess. The Cardinal, as superior of her convent, was absolute within its walls ; and the order for the immediate expulsion of Melanthe, conveyed to the Abbess by the paper she now held, was a step which she knew, however unusual, did not exceed his prerogative. So despotic was the power of the fathers of the church, that all resistance to their mandates was vain ; and the tears of the good Abbess fell fast upon the head of Melanthe, as the poor girl, overcome by this sudden view of her desolate sudden position, threw herself into the arms of her only friend, and besought her not to deprive her of her protection.

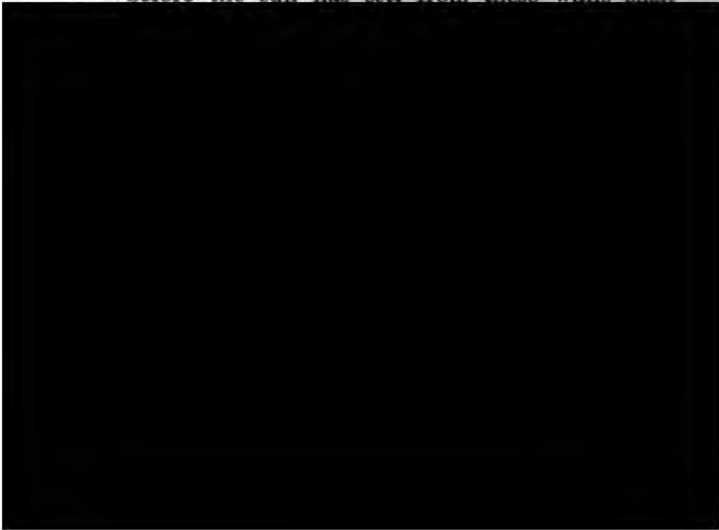
“ My daughter,” said the Abbess, “ you know not what you ask. Willingly would I retain you in this holy place ; but the power is not mine. At the command of his Eminence, the Cardinal, must every bar give way. Shouldst thou remain after this order to depart, each cell would be examined, and, merciful Father, protect them ! even the faces of the youngest of our nuns might be exposed to

the rude gaze of strangers. Heaven shield our house from such a scandal !” and the pious mother crossed herself devoutly, and raised her eyes to the figure of Christ, which hung above the pallet of Melanthe.

“ But not yet—surely not yet,” exclaimed Melanthe, with a shudder ; “ let me look at the paper.”

“ Alas ! my child, we may not delay—the very hour is named, beyond which it is forbidden that you should tarry within our walls.”

“ It is so,” said Melanthe, clasping her hands in horror, for she remembered the words of Borgia, “ before the sun has set, from these walls shalt



of the Speranza ;' no other is named in it. Yes, that is the best plan—with her you can remain in safety until the return of Hassan."

"Blessed mother of God!" said Melanthe, raising her hands to heaven, "it is thou who hast inspired this thought."

"Yes, yes, my child, let us give glory to the blessed Madonna," said the Abbess; "she will aid us in the moment of peril. But the hour advances—I must seek for other counsel in this case; we must not offend the Cardinal. I will send for Padre Anselmo, and in his care - - -"

A shriek from her companion interrupted the speech of the good Abbess, who, unused to violent emotions, and still more unacquainted with the causes from which they spring, gazed compassionately upon the terrified countenance of Melanthe, and drawing her nearer to her, she said,

"Poor child! her fear has turned her brain. Be calm, my daughter; such terrors are an offence to heaven, and the blessed saints. Look up to the sweet face of the Holy Virgin, and remember

her sufferings; and yet she feared not, but trusted in God, and is now Queen of Heaven. Kneel to her, my child, and pray that she may guide you on your way !”

Melanthe did as she was desired; and the holy nun laid her hand upon the head of the weeping girl, and repeated a short prayer.

“ I will go, mother !” said Melanthe, as she rose from her knees.

“ See, the sun has nearly set,” she added, pointing to the window, and her heart sickening as she spoke, for she thought on the words of Borgia.

“ And whither will you go, my child ?”

“ I will return home; and should I find it im-

“ And why so, my daughter ? you were ever an especial favourite with our confessor,” said the Abbess.

“ I fear—I believe,” stammered Melanthe, “ I have offended him of late ; but promise me, dear mother, not to speak of me to him at present, and not to tell him where I am gone.”

“ I will promise it,” replied the Abbess, looking much perplexed ; “ but the counsels of a man so holy - - -”

“ See, see, the sun sinks behind the trees,” interrupted Melanthe, who, oppressed by a nervous terror, now seemed full of impatience to depart. “ Farewell, dear mother, bless me before I go !” and Melanthe bent her head before the Abbess.

“ I do, my child,” replied the latter ; “ and may the mother of God take you to her safe keeping !”

“ Pray for me,” said Melanthe, in a hoarse voice ; “ I am alone in the world.”

A deep sob from the Abbess proved that the somewhat selfish fear she had at first entertained, that her protection of Melanthe might

entail danger or disgrace upon her convent was fast giving way to sorrow for the loss of one who had been as a daughter unto her.

“ Pray for me,” repeated Melanthe, “ and speak kindly of me to the good sisters. I cannot bid them farewell—they would weep to see me driven from their walls.” **The voice of Melanthe faltered, and, for a moment, she clasped her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out some hideous vision ; then, turning to the Abbess, who was vainly endeavouring to stifle feelings of sympathy and kindness, the indulgence of which her view of religion taught her to believe was sinful, she added, “ I am miserable, but not guilty—in heaven is my hope !”**

window she saw Melanthe cross the outer court of the convent. A moment afterwards the heavy swing of the iron-studded door announced that the desolate and friendless was driven from the shelter she had sought.

CHAPTER XXVI.

No joy awaited Melanthe on re-entering her former home. That word, so full of charm to some, is to others without meaning ; and Melanthe, as she looked around the vacant chambers, felt that to her it was so. No loved form was there to greet her view,—no voice of welcome sounded on her return.—all was silent and cold, and memory alone


shown, by his contempt of the sanctity of the convent, how regardless he would be of all restraint, should it interfere with his plans.

The prompt execution of his first threat, had filled her soul with a terrible conviction, which in vain she struggled to repel. She now saw that his thirst for revenge was more ardent than she had originally believed; and the helpless fear which took possession of her mind, as she pictured to herself the possibility of his conveying to the ear of Montesecco the odious calumnies of which he had contrived in Rome to render her the victim, paralysed for the moment all power of thought and action.

But the deep love which she bore to Montesecco, though it had been the first feeling to take alarm at such a prospect, soon, by its own strength and the purity of its nature, rose superior to its terrors; and a sentiment of regret for the injury she had done him by the suspicion of his trust in her faith being shaken by the slanderous representations of others, took the place of all previous uneasiness. Secure in his affection, all her trials could be

endured ; but to merit its continuance she felt that unreserved confidence had become a duty ; and after some reflection she determined that, however painful might be the effort, no false delicacy should prevent her from disclosing to him the embarrassment of her present position. In the absence of Hassan, she had no other alternative ; and by her silence she judged that she might justly incur the reproach of having patiently endured the accusation under which she now suffered.

This decision once formed, her mind comparatively recovered its tone ; but the next difficulty which presented itself appeared almost insurmountable. The actual shade of Melanthe's



To ascertain the part of the country in which Montesecco commanded in person was the first point. Melanthe, whose trust in her lover was not to be shaken by appearances, had constantly repelled the idea as it had arisen, that it was strange Montesecco had not himself communicated the intelligence she was about to seek ; but remembering his return, and the mysterious disappearance of the scroll he had left, she reflected that it was possible the same hidden interference might have again been made use of ; and her heart acquitted him she loved of even the semblance of neglect.

Little did Montesecco suppose that the assurance of affection and faith, which he had constantly addressed to Melanthe by the messengers dispatched from the army, had all, by the vigilance of the Cardinal, been intercepted and destroyed ; and as, in his banishment, he bewailed the caution or timidity which appeared to be the cause of his not receiving the answers he implored her to send as a relief to his sorrow, still less did he imagine that at the same moment Melanthe was endeavouring, and without success, to obtain intelligence of his movements.

For several days she dispatched Mariana to the city, with strict injunctions not to return without having obtained the information she required. It appeared as if a spell hung over the good nurse, who always came back with her head full of anecdotes, but without having ascertained the point so much desired by her mistress. Each day that Mariana had quitted the house, it seemed as though she had met with the very person who could give her full instruction upon the subject required; and yet each day had been consumed in researches which always proved fruitless, until Melanthe at last tremblingly confessed to herself, that the spell by which poor Mariana appeared bound was no

soon found Mariana had confined her inquiries, and, as might naturally have been expected, had received innumerable contradictory accounts.

The peculiarity of her position, induced Melanthe to have recourse to what she deemed at that moment an extreme measure ; and she resolved to address herself to one whom she otherwise would never have approached, and to request the advice of Jacopo Orsini. Having thus decided, she revealed her intention to Mariana, entreating her to accompany her ; but no persuasion could induce Mariana to listen to the proposal. With all the vehemence of an Italian, she insisted that all who were not friends were enemies. The Orsini had chosen to abandon Melanthe, her life was therefore not safe amongst them. So violent were her asseverations, although without better foundation than her own prejudices, that Mariana actually prevailed upon her mistress to forego her intended visit.

“ Wait patiently, my child,” she said, over and over again, as one evening they were discussing the point ; “ wait patiently, and the blessed Madonna will send us help.”

“ Ah !—but when ? dear Mariana. I have

wearied Our Lady with my prayers, and all in vain," replied Melanthe.

"When? Now that is so like a young girl—when? the only word they ever say. As if there were not time enough for all things. I remember the day - - -"

"Hush!" said Melanthe, "heard you no sound?"

"Nothing. Holy saints, defend us! why, how pale you look, child," exclaimed Mariana.

"I thought I heard a step," said Melanthe, drawing nearer to her nurse.

"Stefano, perhaps, in the garden - - -"

"Perhaps," answered Melanthe, though by no means assured of the fact.

upon the face of Melanthe, for her eyes were strained towards the window, which opened to the ground, her cheeks were colourless, and a nervousness, unusual to her, seemed to contract her whole frame. Mariana hastily stepped to the window. She saw, or fancied she saw, a muffled figure glide quickly into the shade; but for once prudently forbearing to mention her impression, she contented herself with looking into the garden. No form was visible; but the wind blew into the apartment a small strip of paper which had apparently been laid upon the edge of the window frame. Melanthe sprang forward, and seized it. A glance revealed its author.

“Hast thou forgotten my words? ‘For those who cross my path, there are dungeons, or death!’” was all that the writing contained.

“I knew it—it was him. O God, protect me!” exclaimed Melanthe, sinking on her knees.

“Well, what is this? another love letter,” exclaimed Mariana, whose curiosity was doubly excited by her inability to read the writing which had fallen from the hand of Melanthe.

“A love letter, I dare be sworn; and she is

thanking the Virgin for it. Ah ! did not I tell you it would all come in good time." Mariana, as she ceased speaking, raised her eyes from the scroll she had been trying to decypher ; but the deep grief which sat upon the face of Melanthe so much alarmed the good nurse, that she instantly caught her in her arms, and, covering her hands with kisses, endeavoured to comfort her. Melanthe did not weep,—but she leaned her head against the breast of Mariana, and, by the violent trembling of her limbs, betrayed the sufferings her lips refused to speak.

" Where is Gennaro ?" she suddenly asked, for a horrible fear had entered into her mind that the

peculiar sagacity. "It is not for me, a poor servant, to judge of my master's ways ; yet I do think, and I must say—indeed, I did venture to hint as much, and if the truth must be told he quite agreed with me, that is, Stefano, to whom I just happened to mention my idea upon the subject, agreed with me, that it was highly injudicious, not to say improper. No, Heaven forbid I should say such a word of my master—but injudicious—imprudent—not quite right—in fact, very wrong, to leave such a lady as the Signora, my mistress, with no one better to look after her than a poor dumb boy, who was not able to take care of himself. To be sure, as Stefano said, 'There could be no love-making, as he could not speak.' But then I replied to Stefano, 'Why, you old blockhead, can't people speak with their eyes as well as their tongues?' and then he had the impudence to tell me, 'he only wished that I would adopt that mode of expression,' as if forsooth he was not too fortunate that I should speak to him at all. Santa Maria ! one would think he was overwhelmed with my conversation, while it is well known that I never condescend to waste my words on him, or any

such idiot. Why this very day he fell fast asleep, while I was endeavouring to enlighten him with a few of my observations on the world ; and you know, my dear child, how much Mariana has seen, for you must remember all that went on at Naples. Ah ! no, you were too young, but surely - - - "

" It must be so," said Melanthe, who, absorbed by her own reflections, had not heard one word that had been uttered by her nurse. " If not, it is but my own peril—I will prepare."

Without further explanation to her astonished companion, Melanthe crossed the room, and, unlocking a cabinet, took from one of its drawers a nurse, which she placed within the folds of her

nurse, for the conviction suddenly rushed upon her that the senses of her companion were disordered.

Melanthe started, when she heard her name pronounced in so loud a tone; and her eye wandered round the room, as if in search of the speaker, and falling on the frightened face of Mariana, she stopped, and gazed upon her; and as she gazed she passed her hand over her own forehead, as if to force a recollection that would not come. But the mind, too deeply pre-occupied, refused to turn to the common cares of life, and with a vacant stare, which completed the terror of Mariana, Melanthe in a low tone uttered the words, "to-morrow!"

"Stay, stay, my child!" said the nurse, advancing towards her.

"To-morrow!" repeated Melanthe, mechanically, and without withdrawing her fixed look from the face of Mariana, though moving backwards to avoid her embrace.

"Oh Heavens!" cried Mariana, stopping, and clasping her hands.

"To-morrow!" said Melanthe, as she disappeared from the room; but the tone in which she spoke was almost inaudible.

"She is crazed," said Mariana to herself. "Ahi! Ahi! it is the Malocchio, the evil eye has struck her; Malocchio maledetto! That accursed stranger;" and Mariana shook her hand towards the window where the figure had appeared. "It was the Malocchio, that almost turned her to stone; and I, Holy Virgin defend me, I too looked upon him, but I had the amulet blessed by Saint Rosalia;" and Mariana drew from her gown a bunch of the little charms, without which no Neapolitan peasant thinks himself safe from the malice of the evil eye. She crossed herself, and seemed comforted.

A moment afterwards, Gennaro entered the

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE morning had scarcely dawned, when Melanthe arose from her sleepless couch. From the hour when, on the previous evening, she had received the mysterious warning to desist in her endeavours to communicate with those who might protect her, one single idea had occupied the mind of Melanthe. It was the idea of Hassan—Hassan, who, if not her father, had always shown her a father's love, and to whom she therefore owed the duty and affection of a daughter, was the person on whom all her thoughts were now fixed. She thought of him, not as he had quitted her presence, full of hope that his journey would be crowned with success, and that the discovery of the abode of Elphenor, in restoring to him a friend, would also restore to her a father; but she pictured to herself

Hassan betrayed—imprisoned, and perhaps groaning in misery, under the hidden tyranny of the Cardinal.

From the moment when the repeated threat of a dungeon to any one who should befriend her, had suggested the idea of the detention of Hassan, her mind had known no rest; and reflection had confirmed the impression, until it seemed incomprehensible that it should not sooner have occurred to her that his prolonged absence could not be caused by accidental circumstances. One by one, she now recollected a variety of apparently inadvertent expressions, made use of by Borgia when speaking of the journey of Hassan, which at least proved

the semblance of virtue imposed upon him ; and he therefore unshrinkingly displayed to her eyes the villainy and unbridled profligacy more congenial to his nature.

The idea which Melanthe had conceived of his character, was sufficiently degrading, although ignorant of his excesses, or the depth of infamy into which his monstrous vices could sink him. Still she knew enough of his utter disregard of justice, or consequences, not to be aware, that, should it suit his purpose, the danger of an insult offered to a person so generally respected as Hassan was in Rome, would not be, in the eyes of Borgia, a circumstance of sufficient importance for consideration.

So firmly had the impression taken possession of her mind, of his having exercised violence for the purpose of detaining Hassan from his home, that she resolved to lose no time in endeavouring to ascertain the justness of her suspicions. By a fortunate coincidence of circumstances, the prisons of Rome were accessible to her ; and she forthwith determined to explore them, ere she carried her

researches further. Once assured that Hassan was not within their walls, she might depart from the city, could she contrive to do so unobserved ; and by making her way to some of the neighbouring towns, might find a refuge there, until she could discover where Montesecco was, and claim his protection. A sensation of relief entered the bosom of Melanthe, as she contemplated the possibility of escape from the spot polluted by the presence of her arch enemy the Cardinal ; yet the first step towards emancipation from her difficulties remained to be taken, for her generous heart refused to think only of herself, until assured that the safety of Hassan could in no way be affected by her departure.

of alarming the inmates, she waited for a few minutes before demanding admission.

The spot where she stood was familiar to her. It was not very long since she had visited it. Her errand had then been one of charity and kindness, of which Heaven had ordained she was now to reap the reward. Ramiro, the owner of the house, and principal gaoler of Saint Angelo, was brother to Stefano, the gardener of Hassan. Like the latter, he had had one daughter whom he cherished, but whose loss had left him comfortless upon the earth. It was by the death-bed of this only daughter that he had first seen and known Melanthe; and touched by the tenderness which she manifested towards his dying child, and the generosity with which she ministered to her wants and the caprices of illness, Ramiro had sworn, with the fervour of an excitable disposition, so natural to those of his sunny land, that no service or aid should ever be required of him by Melanthe, whether for herself, or in behalf of those dear to her, that he would not willingly perform, even were his life to become the sacrifice of his devotion.

At the time of making this promise, Melanthe, apparently to him, was prosperous and happy ; but never, in the brightest days of her prosperity, had the heart of Ramiro warmed towards her with feelings of gratitude and devotion so ardent, as at the moment when, weeping and trembling, she stood beneath his humble roof, and poured forth her sorrow to his wondering ear.

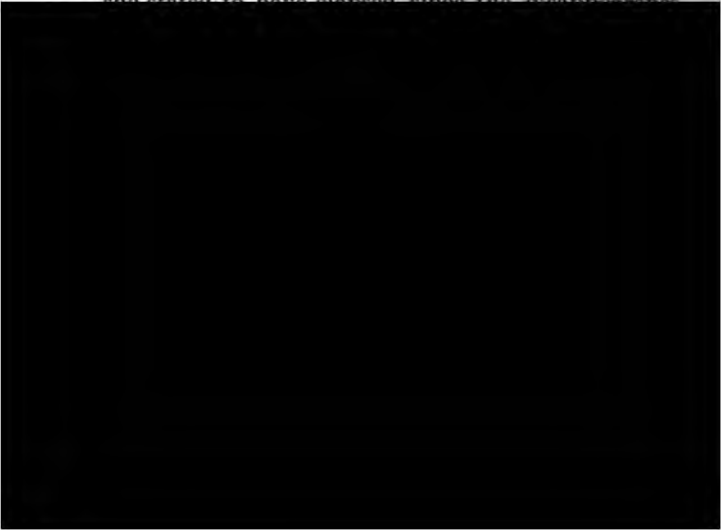
Melanthe, in confiding to Ramiro the secret suspicion she entertained of the detention of Hassan, carefully abstained from mentioning the name of Borgia ; and with the true delicacy inseparable from good and gentle feeling, Ramiro not only forbore to inquire further into the mystery than she

Ah ! well, she is gone, and Ramiro is alone in the world ; and the Signora she loved, and who so often bade me be comforted, now comes to me for help. She shall have it, and the spirit of my sweet Lucia will smile upon me from heaven !”

Thus reasoned poor Ramiro, as he thought of his much-loved daughter, and looked upon the angel face of Melanthe, which he had so often seen bending over the pillow of Lucia, while her lips murmured a prayer. The blessing of the father’s heart was about to bring forth its fruit ; and with a feeling almost of pride, Ramiro contemplated the danger to which his devotion might expose him. It caused him, however, no little pain to see the conviction which seemed to have taken possession of the mind of Melanthe, that within the walls of the prison lay the object of her search ; for better informed, than she appeared to be, of the tyrannical power which so often consigned the innocent to his care, he knew how slender was their chance of deliverance.

The person of Hassan being unknown to him, he could not, by her description, decide whether or

not he was an inmate of the dismal abode they were about to explore ; for the admittance of prisoners of importance was of such frequent occurrence, and conducted with so much secrecy, that there were many within the walls, whose faces were concealed from all but those who had special orders to visit them, being immured in dungeons, the doors of which were secured by keys in the possession of the Governor. Amongst these, it was possible that Hassan might be confined ; but to the eager inquiries of Melanthe, Ramiro could only answer, that, to the best of his belief, no prisoner had been committed to the secret dungeons within the time she stated to have elapsed since the disappearance



pity were scarcely dry upon her cheek as she passed from the cell of some unhappy wretch, who eagerly related the hardship of his case, imploring her intercession in his behalf, ere they gushed forth anew, as a tale still more deplorable met her ear, and the sense of powerless compassion struck her to the heart.

Yet, as she moved on, she often longed again to hear those voices and those prayers, for more than once, as, chilled and shuddering, she threaded her way through the winding passages, and the damp and murky air with which the lower vaults were filled, the stare of idiotcy, and the shriek of the maniac, told that reason had perished under the dismal horror which the flesh could still resist. Sometimes, a groan was the only answer to the cheering word which Ramiro ventured to bestow ; but too often the silence with which this was received, made him shake his head, and froze the heart of Melanthe, for she felt in the presence of the dead.

Many of the secret dungeons were below the level of the Tiber, and the only light which ever

entered there was from two narrow loop-holes above the door, which opened to the passage, but which door Ramiro assured her he never recollected to have seen unlocked. Heart rending as was this intelligence, as it concerned the fate of the wretched occupants of these loathsome graves of the living, Melanthe felt comforted at having convinced herself that the abode of Hassan, at least, was not amongst them; and with a silent prayer that heaven would look down in its mercy upon those whom the hardness of man against man had reduced to such misery, Melanthe quitted the lower dungeons; and, as she ascended the rugged steps which led

“ And their crime — what was it ?” continued Melanthe, interested for the fate of those who had belonged to her own land.

“ They conspired against the state, at least so it was said,” added Ramiro, with a shrug of his shoulders ; “ but the Signora can see them. Here are the cells, and there are all the names they had adopted. His Holiness the Pope ordered them to be written up over each door, as,” he said, “ if they happened to look out, they might find the consolation of philosophy. Such was the message that I heard delivered to them by the governor, the day they were admitted.”

The cruelty of this insult became instantly apparent to Melanthe ; for the cells were placed back to back, so as to preclude the possibility of the prisoners having a view of each other ; and, as she moved along, she beheld, by the faint light which streamed from the high and grated windows, above the passage, that each cell bore the name of one of the ancient philosophers.

“ That was their chief,” whispered Ramiro, as he pointed to one cell a little smaller than the rest, and over which Melanthe read the name of

“Socrates.” “And because he was a great man in his own country, his Holiness said he should be the least here ; and so he was brought to the prison upon a mule, with his hands tied behind him, and his face towards the tail, like a felon. I remember it as if it was but yesterday.”

Melanthe paused before the little window of the cell, and gazed upon the unhappy prisoner whom misfortune could not shelter from savage indignity. He was an old man ; but, as he rose, and looked from the window, Melanthe could see that his noble form was still unbent ; and the calm reflective brow, round which fell a profusion of silver hair, which, mingling with his long beard, descended nearly to

over the tomb of its last hope, awaited the release of the spirit, as the end of all its woes, and now it needed but the shadow of a passing form to bring back thoughts of liberty and life!—What was there in the veiled and shrouded figure before him, that made his limbs tremble and his heart beat? He who had long since resigned himself to captivity and death, what was there, that should move him, but that the form was woman's form; and with that word, came thoughts of gentle tears, and pity, and release, for why should she seek to gaze upon his sorrow, if she had not come to save? And the resolution of years gave way before that one moment of hope; and even in that dark cell, the cheek of the miserable man reddened as he felt the weakness of human philosophy, when weighed against the strength of human affection! So strong was the sudden emotion which the appearance of Melanthe had excited, that he trembled as he heard the words she addressed to him, inquiring the reason of his detention?

“Lady!” he replied, “for years have I asked the same question; but in vain.”

“How?” said Melanthe. “You were not even made acquainted with the accusation against you?”

“Conspiracy was the word which sounded in my ears, as, hooted and insulted by the rabble, I, with my companions, was led hither. Conspiracy against the Pope, and destruction to the Roman State; these were the watch words which have consigned us, a poor company of strangers and of scholars, to darkness and to chains!”

“Scholars?” said Melanthe, inquiringly; “Greek scholars?”

“Yes, Lady! we were scholars, and we were Greeks. Driven from our happy land by the

the world, we took the classic names of those whose deeds and words were evermore the theme of our discourse. The study of Philosophy was all our care ; but despotism, whose footstool is ignorance, grew jealous of our labours ; our meetings were pronounced seditious ; and without warning or trial did we learn that henceforth the dungeon was to be our home. Strangers, and helpless, we were torn from the light of day—years have gone by - - - long—cruel years—and still we are here. Lady, you weep - - - ”

“ I do,” said Melanthe, “ for your wrongs, and for my own. I, too, am Greek, and, like you, by all forgotten.”

“ It cannot be,” exclaimed the prisoner ; “ and yet my heart foretold a coming joy. Forgive me, Lady—long years of misery have left me few words of courtesy ; but I thank you for your tears ; and when your steps have borne you hence, think of the old man’s cell, which for a moment has been gladdened by the presence of one, with whom, as coming from the land he loved, he has dared to claim kindred.”

The voice of the prisoner faltered, for the avowal of Melanthe that she belonged to his persecuted country, had destroyed the hope with which her presence had at first inspired him.

“ I have but little power,” said Melanthe; “ but I have the will to serve you—say, is there aught I may do ?”

“ Nothing,” replied the prisoner, sadly.

“ I have money—jewels ; I am rich,” suggested Melanthe.

“ Alas ! it would be useless. The wealth of our scattered nation would not buy our freedom. Our gaolers are the only ones not venal—bigotry

see the features of the only being who for years has spoken kindly to me. The light is dim—I cannot see your face.”

Melanthe turned ; and taking up the lamp which, at her request, Ramiro had left at a distance during her conversation with the prisoner, she placed it on the ledge of the window, in order that its light might fall upon her features, and then threw back the hood and veil which she had hitherto worn. The light streamed upon her face, and the old man smiled with a melancholy expression as he looked upon her beauty ; but ere long the change which was apparent in the countenance of the prisoner was so alarming, that Melanthe could not for an instant withdraw her eyes from it. The little hue of life which long confinement had left upon his cheek faded away, while his large dark eyes seemed to dilate to an unnatural size, as he gazed upon the figure before him, and scanned every feature with an intensity unaccountable to her.

Suddenly his eye caught the glitter of the jewelled cross, which Melanthe, imagining that

without some bribe of sufficient value she might not perhaps be able to effect her purpose of exploring the prisons, had hung round her neck.

Without speaking, the prisoner passed his hand through the bars of his cell, and brought the cross nearer to his view.

"It was my mother's," said Melanthe, sadly.

"Her name?" asked the prisoner, in a hoarse voice; and his hand trembled, so that the cross fell from it.

"Ida!" replied Melanthe, hurriedly, for a thought suddenly struck her.

"Melanthe—my child! I felt it," cried the prisoner, as he fell senseless against the wall of his

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was almost dark before the kind-hearted Ramiro returned that day to separate the father from the child ; and, as he entered the cell which contained them, his heart, while it swelled with the remembrance of his own bereavement, which the sight of their happiness called forth, blessed also the fortunate chance which had thus enabled him to discharge his debt of gratitude to Melanthe. The joy of Elphenor was the joy of one whose pent-up affections were at last permitted to overflow ; and the emotion his countenance betrayed was strangely at variance with its usual stately calm. The sternness of the sage was gone—the *father* shone in its place. And Melanthe,—surely her sorrows were now ended !—She had found her father, and she looked up in his face, while one

bright smile chased another ; and her hand clasped that of Elphenor, as if never to relax its hold.

Little remained for her to learn of his hard fate, beyond what the first words of the prisoner had taught her. For some years after his flight from Constantinople he had lived comparatively in obscurity, until the persecution which arose against all men of letters, had involved him in their common ruin ; and the Academy which they had founded, and of which he was the head, was denounced as a cover for seditious meetings, dangerous to the state, and its members condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

history ; but Elphenor, wild with the joy that glowed in his bosom, forbore to dwell unnecessarily upon the sorrows of his past life, though eagerly demanding from his daughter a full recital of every circumstance relating to her own. With what fervour did the now happy father call down blessings upon the head of Hassan, the preserver of his child ; but sadly he listened to the account of poor Gennaro—the child of Demetrius and the beautiful Chezmé. How did the heart of Elphenor long for the presence of the two persons, whose existence seemed to connect his own with the past—Hassan and Gennaro—the friends—the protectors of his daughter ; and again and again did he make Melanthe repeat everything which she had already told him, as though he could scarcely believe that all was not illusion. And Melanthe, in her turn, would question him, and weep as he spake of Ida, the mother whose memory she revered, and whose dreadful fate she now first learned.

Thus in smiles and in tears, in present rapture, and in remembrance of past grief, the father and daughter spent the first day of their re-union ; and when the voice of Ramiro awakened them from

their trance of delight, they started, as they remembered that as yet no plan for attempting the release of Elphenor had been determined between them. Various suggestions were now hastily offered ; but to all some objection appeared, until at length Ramiro, who had not hitherto taken any part in the discussion, interposed.

“ It is of no use,” he said ; “ a petition to the Pope will do nothing. Hundreds have gone from hence—I myself have borne them—laid them at the feet of his Holiness, and all in vain—no answer ever was returned ! ”

“ Then what shall we do ? Good Ramiro, counsel us,” exclaimed Melanthe, who in her joy

Pope may be head of the Church, but that the Cardinal Borgia is head of Rome. Without him, nothing is done ; and did his Holiness command the prison doors to open, one word from the Cardinal would close them, and for ever."

" We must gain him to our side," said Elphenor. " Surely he is just—he will listen to our prayer. Melanthe, thou wilt seek this good man - - - but what ails thee, my child ?" he added, in a voice of alarm, as he marked the sudden change that came over the countenance of his daughter.

" Nothing, father," said Melanthe, faintly.

" My child !" exclaimed Elphenor, catching her in his arms ; " she is faint—see how she trembles."

" No, it is past now," said Melanthe, struggling to appear calm, though the deadly terror of the view which had thus suddenly opened to her, had almost deprived her of her senses. " It is nothing ; but after so much joy, this difficulty - - -" She paused, and Elphenor rejoined,

" We must not look upon it as such. To know that there is a person who can save us, is much. Doubtless, this Holy man will be our friend—his



and she shuddered as she contemplated the alternative to which she was thus cruelly reduced.

“ You hear his words,” said Elphenor, when Ramiro had ceased speaking. “ My child, will you not help me ? ”

The touching distress with which this was uttered, overcame the unhappy girl ; and she threw herself sobbing upon the bosom of her father, who, imagining that the fear of failure was the cause of her agitation, endeavoured by the most soothing arguments, in which he constantly dwelt upon the good qualities with which his fancy had invested Borgia, to comfort and re-assure her—until, writhing beneath his words, she distractedly exclaimed,

“ Father, dear father ! I will go to the Cardinal ! ” and tearing herself from the arms of Elphenor, quitted the prison.

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MELANTHE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE MEDICI.

A Tale of the Fifteenth Century.

BY

MRS. MABERLY,

AUTHOR OF "EMILY;" "THE LOVE MATCH," &c.

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MELANTHE ;
OR,
THE DAYS OF THE MEDICI.

CHAPTER I.

THE first care of Borgia, upon quitting the presence of Melanthe after the interview in the Convent, which had converted him into a bitter enemy, was to devise some plan by which his vengeance might surely reach her. The forfeit of her liberty or life was not the punishment he contemplated. He knew too well that a mind like that of Melanthe would gladly welcome such deliverance from the torture he hoped to inflict. Convinced that the attachment which subsisted between her and Montesecco was more serious than he had at first imagined, the Cardinal resolved

upon a double vengeance. He was too deeply versed in the feelings of the mind not to be certain that to a nature so elevated and pure as that of his destined victim, the agony of being despised by the being she fondly loved, would be the greatest misery which could be inflicted ; and he determined to lose no time in so arranging his plans, that the guilt of Melanthe should be made apparent to Montesecco, before the possibility could exist of her holding any communication with him.

To effect this, two things were necessary. The first was, to seclude his victim so that it should be impossible for her to make known her distress. This, by means of his numerous emissaries, would



the wily Cardinal well knew that his hopes would end in disappointment. It therefore became expedient to have recourse to the aid of others; and Borgia cast his eyes around, in order to discover a fitting agent.

After mature deliberation, his choice was made. Calling to mind the anxiety which Luca Pitti had betrayed when the love of Montesecco for Melanthe had first become known to him, the Cardinal decided that some secret reason existed which rendered the prospect of their union distasteful to him. The power which Luca Pitti seemed to exercise over the young Condottiere had not been unobserved by Borgia; and without seeking to ascertain its cause, he resolved to turn the circumstance to the furtherance of his own designs.

Borgia seldom allowed a long interval to elapse between the arrangement of his plans and their execution. The morning after the unhappy Melanthe had been driven from the Convent, the Cardinal bent his steps towards the residence of Luca Pitti. A day later, and the sorrow which he meditated for his victim might, by accidental circumstances, have been averted. He found Luca

his uncle Jacopo, had been
but not without difficulty
man leaned to the Medici.
their families was at that
of the Italian nobles, and
safety was constantly sacrific

Jacopo de' Pazzi loved
Giuliano as his sons ; but
had they opposed themselves
house of the Pazzi, which
Medici in point of riches
the sole government of
probability have been sacrificed
ambition of the family. Just
while the weakest of its
support, the strongest threat

.. . . .

sweep past, and overwhelm him. Then, who would credit the assertion of his innocence? who would value the profession of his faith? Involved in a common ruin, or success, who would inquire which branch still flourished on the tree, or which had perished? Feeble and terrified, Jacopo listened to this false reasoning, until, having once admitted the idea, it grew and strengthened, and the head of the Pazzi suffered his name to be enrolled as leader of the conspiracy.

From that hour all seemed to prosper. Montughi, the villa of Jacopo, situated about a mile from Florence, was the spot chosen for the meetings of the discontented; and many of the citizens, gaining courage to avow a spirit of jealousy and impatience of the control of the Medici, under which they had long chafed, secretly resorted thither; while influence and money soon lent to the movements of the conspirators a much more serious aspect than Francesco, on his arrival at Florence, had anticipated. So rapidly had the organization of the malcontents within the city been effected, that it had become an imperative necessity to assure them of the long-promised auxiliary aid;

and messengers were instantly dispatched to all the foreign powers implicated in the infamous transaction.

The death of Piero de' Medici, which had taken place immediately upon the return of Lorenzo from Rome, had infused new spirit into the hearts of the discontented nobles and citizens, whose jealousy was still more keenly aroused by the almost unanimous deference with which the magistrates had entreated Lorenzo to assume the reins of government. No time was to be lost, as every day added to the strength of those, whose only crime was being already too popular, and too firmly fixed in the authorities.

by too frank an avowal of his doubts with regard to the success of such a scheme, to throw any obstacle in the way of an undertaking by which he hoped to reap the reward of his long suppressed hatred to the Medici, Luca Pitti accepted the mission of the Pope. The offer of a principality, and the possession of revenues proportionate to its grandeur, was the tempting bait held out to the Condottiere; but even this, which the dependent position of Montesecco would, on any other terms, have rendered acceptable, was felt by Luca Pitti to be insufficient to shake the honour and integrity of him whose adhesion they sought. Conviction of the justice of their cause, or the unworthiness of their destined victim, would, he imagined, be the sole condition by which the co-operation of Montesecco could be secured. But to make treachery assume the garb of justice, or brand with ignominy the idol of the Florentine public, was a task which appeared to Luca Pitti almost hopeless. Notwithstanding, his word was pledged. The wishes of the Pope, and the hopes of his confederates in infamy, rested upon this point; and Luca Pitti prepared to fulfil his promise.

The day was fixed for his departure on his journey to join Montesecco, when, to his surprise, late in the night which preceded it, and disguised so as to baffle all attempt at discovery, the Cardinal Borgia stood before him. Deep was the conference which ensued ; and could the feelings which separately animated the breasts of these monsters of deceit and villainy have been laid bare, each would have started to find himself outdone in baseness.

Yet, with the mean distrust natural to the wicked, neither wholly confided in the other. Luca Pitti carefully avoided all allusion to the motives of his anxiety to prevent an union between Melanthe and Montesecco ; and the Cardinal was equally on his guard to conceal the spirit of revenge which prompted his actions. Affecting to be solely actuated by sympathy for the feelings of Luca Pitti towards Montesecco, which he had imparted to him upon a former occasion, Borgia merely recounted the facts, by distorting which he had already contrived to steal from Melanthe the friendship of Jacopo Orsini and his daughter ; adding, the important discovery he pretended to have made, of her intention to appeal to

Montesecco for assistance. Having sufficiently awakened the fears of Luca Pitti, he suddenly proposed to him, in case he should succeed in detaching Montesecco from Melanthe, an union between him and Giulia, daughter of the eldest of the Colonna, an alliance which he pretended he had been charged to negotiate by the Pope, who, in the event of the concurrence of Montesecco, had promised a rich dowry for his bride.

The sallow cheek of Luca Pitti showed more plainly than he could have wished, how clearly the deep insight of Borgia had read the feelings he had endeavoured to conceal; still, though his heart bounded at the prospect of the realization of his secret hopes, his cautious tongue refused to promise that which hereafter it might not be his interest to perform. Vague, therefore, were the assurances of gratitude with which he received the offers of the Cardinal; nevertheless, the latter that night quitted the house of the dissembler, fully satisfied that his insidious arguments had produced the desired effect—the separation of Melanthe and Montesecco was secured; and the profligate Cardinal, as he retraced his steps towards his sumptuous palace,

gloated over the misery he was about to cause, nor did one pang of remorse or pity enter his iron heart as he contemplated his own cowardly act of oppression and revenge. He had succeeded. The helpless girl, whose love was her only wealth and hope, would be utterly crushed by his malice. He revelled in the thought; for the fiendish nature of the man now urged him to scoff at the passion which was raging in his breast, until he persuaded himself that the gratification of it would be far inferior to the delight he experienced from the certainty of revenge.

“Revenge!—yes, to me, sweeter far, than love is—revenge!” muttered the Cardinal, as he strode along the deserted streets of Rome. And, perhaps, at that moment he thought so.

CHAPTER II.

THE feelings of Melanthe, as she quitted the prison of Elphenor, and regained her home, were of a nature so exciting and complicated, that for some time she could not decide whether joy or sorrow predominated. The rapture of being restored to her father at one instant filled her soul ; while the next brought with it the idea of Borgia ; and the blood, chilled back from her heart, ran shivering along her veins as his image rose to her view. She trembled as she contemplated the horror of placing herself voluntarily in the power of such a man. Still she did not hesitate. Had she not promised her father ? *Her father !* How often did Melanthe repeat these words, till their magic sound seemed to lull all fear. The sense of desolation was gone—the feeling of dependance had passed away ; and gratitude towards Heaven, and towards him,

who, under its presiding influence, had cherished her infant years, and preserved her for the happiness of the present hour, filled the throbbing heart of Melanthe ! Humbly on her knees did she pour forth her thanks to God, and implore his protection through the trial which awaited her ! Nor were the names of Hassan and Gennaro forgotten in her prayers.

Thus had many hours worn away after her return from the prison, when the officious zeal of Mariana disturbed her devotions. Disappointed at the abrupt dismissal with which Melanthe had greeted her offer of attendance upon her return to her home, Mariana had for some time contented herself, either with suppressing her annoyance in sullen silence, or giving utterance to it in querulous attacks upon Stefano for his stupidity in not having discovered the departure of his mistress, or even the hour at which she had quitted the house that morning. In vain the patient Stefano endeavoured to convince her that if he was in fault, she was equally to blame. Mariana would not rest satisfied ; and irritated by the certainty of the existence of a secret which she had not been able to discover, she

determined that Melanthe should not remain in the seclusion of her apartment, whither she had immediately retired, upon her return home. Coming to any decision is ever preferable to remaining in harassing uncertainty ; and the spirit of Mariana grew more tranquil, as she bent her steps to the chamber of Melanthe, and, clamouring for admission, began to urge the almost maternal right which she had to the confidence of her Signora.

Melanthe did not debate the point ; but instantly admitting her faithful servant, she at once gratified her curiosity ; and communicated the joyful intelligence which was the result of her day's absence. In this, Melanthe was actuated by two motives. The one was the feeling of grateful affection with which she remembered the long and faithful services of Mariana, which entitled her to this confidence ; and the next was, the bitter recollection of the manner in which her own former absence from home had been perverted into a foundation for the basest calumny.

The joy of Mariana was expressed by the most extravagant demonstrations ; she wept, laughed, and prayed by turns ; and was only recalled to

composure, by being reminded that much yet remained to be done, ere they might hope to welcome Elphenor to his home.

The repugnance of Melanthe to mention the name of Borgia, almost tempted her to conceal the promise she had made to solicit from him in person the release of her father: but recollecting the danger which might ensue, should her true motive for such a visit remain unexplained, she hastily detailed to Mariana the necessity of again leaving the house, at an early hour on the following morning.

In vain Mariana entreated permission to accompany her. Melanthe steadily refused. The passion of Borgia was to her an idea of such pollution, that she could not bear the chance of its becoming known to another. Mariana, whose head was giddy from curiosity, submitted impatiently to this rejection of her services; and the next morning, with a mixed feeling of apprehension and disappointment, she conducted Melanthe to the gate of the palace of the Cardinal; and having seen her enter it, returned to the house of Hassan.

Refusing to give her name, Melanthe followed

the person, to whom she had addressed her inquiry as to the possibility of seeing the Cardinal, to a small ante room, where she was requested to wait until the answer of his Eminence could be obtained. She was not, however, kept long in suspense; for the secretary of Borgia, who had undertaken to deliver the message, had noted, as Melanthe, on entering the room threw back her veil, the rare beauty of the countenance it had at first concealed, and such visitors he well knew were ever welcome to his Eminence, the Cardinal Borgia.

In a short time a gracious answer was returned; and before Melanthe could consider in what words she might best clothe her request, she had passed the threshold of his chamber,—the door closed—and she found herself alone with Borgia. The start of surprise with which the Cardinal recognised his visitor was not seen by her; and in another moment the self-possession with which he addressed her, and, in terms of courtesy, entreated her to be seated, in some degree restored her tranquillity. She ventured to raise her eyes. Those of the Cardinal were fixed upon some writing he held in his hand, and Melanthe hurriedly glanced round the room.

All that she had ever heard of the luxury of Borgia was far surpassed by that which she beheld. The apartment in which he sat, was not so much distinguished by its size as the costly furniture with which it was filled. The most exquisite taste was displayed in its arrangement. Rare paintings adorned the walls, and draperies of the richest velvet shaded the lofty windows; while the floor of the chamber, composed entirely of precious woods inlaid with ivory, was only partially covered with the gorgeous carpets of the East. To look upon the soft luxuriousness, and to breathe the perfumed atmosphere of the apartment, no one could have imagined it to be the dwelling of a churchman.

velvet, and fastened at the wrists and throat with pearls of enormous value. Jewels of every colour glittered on his fingers; and his hand, of the beauty of which he was perfectly conscious, was fully displayed by the tight and inverted cuff of rich lace, the points of which were attached to the sleeve by buttons of rubies and diamonds. The use of jewels not having been very long permitted to ecclesiastics, the rage for them was extreme, and those of Borgia were estimated at a very large sum.

There was one point, however, the concession of which, not even the credit of the Cardinal could wring from any of the Pontiffs over whom he had successively exercised an almost despotic sway. The shaven crown still continued an indispensable mark of Priesthood; and Borgia, with the rest, was forced to submit. But as the extent of the sacrifice was not regulated by law, he contrived that his hair should be so cut, as at will the circle might be concealed by the redundant locks with which nature had endowed him; and which, mingling with the beard of glossy blackness, always trimmed and perfumed with scrupulous neatness, not a little

contributed to the effect of the handsome and striking person of the Cardinal.

As he sat before Melanthe in his luxurious chamber, his arm resting upon the writing table, whose crimson covering of velvet, deeply fringed with gold, swept upon the floor, his rich and stately appearance differed widely from that in which she had last beheld him. But not more changed were his garments than were apparently his feelings. Unaccustomed to fathom the depth of dissimulation to which a nature like that of Borgia could stoop, Melanthe eagerly persuaded herself, that in the courteous tone and bland smile with which the Cardinal welcomed her unexpected presence, there existed perhaps a wish to repair the sorrows he had already caused her; and a feeling of hope arose in her bosom, which, alas! had no better foundation than in the nobleness of her own heart, incapable of nourishing an implacable resentment. After a few moments, during which the Cardinal seemed absorbed in the perusal of the paper which he held in his hand, but which in reality were stolen for the purpose of deciding upon

the manner in which this unexpected interview was to be conducted, Borgia raised his eyes towards Melanthe, and apologizing for having thus momentarily withdrawn his attention from her, he continued,

“ I might have pleaded surprise as an excuse for not sooner inquiring to what fortunate circumstance I am indebted for the honour of your visit, had I not been aware that filial affection supersedes all other in the bosom of the Signora Melanthe - - - ”

“ How ? ” exclaimed Melanthe, “ you already know - - - ”

“ Yes ! ” replied Borgia, as Melanthe, overcome by her astonishment, paused for an instant. “ I already know that the wishes of your heart are accomplished ; and that yesterday in the prisoner, who, under the assumed title of one of the Greek philosophers, had been confined in Saint Angelo, you discovered Elphenor ; and in the arms of your newly found father, forgot the hatred you had vowed to Roderigo Borgia.”

“ No ! not forgot,” said Melanthe, alarmed by the look of the Cardinal, as he pronounced the last

words; "not forgot, but ---" and again she stopped, fearful of saying too little or too much.

"You cannot then forget and forgive?" said Borgia gently.

"No!" replied Melanthe solemnly; "but I can remember and forgive. Yes—all shall be forgiven—all—the sorrow which you have caused me—the sin to which you would have tempted me; and the blighted name which, alas! is now mine through your means—all shall be forgiven, if you will restore to me my father!"

"It will be difficult—if not impossible," said Borgia.

"Oh! not impossible," exclaimed Melanthe. "You have the power—be generous—and use it. See, how I have trusted you—I, against whom you vowed eternal wrath. I, a poor helpless girl,—I have come to you—alone—to pray for my father. My poor father!" continued Melanthe, kneeling as she spoke, "have pity on him!—For years he has not seen the light of day—for years no voice of kindness has reached him in his dungeon. Shut out from all, he has grown old in darkness and in

chains—forgotten and alone ! Alone for years !—
Oh !—Cardinal, as you are great, so be merciful !
He was not guilty—and had he been so, still let
the kindness of your heart plead for him. Have
you no sin, for which you hope to be forgiven ? ”

The tears of Melanthe choked her utterance ;
and still kneeling upon the ground, she wept
unrestrainedly. But the Cardinal did not speak,
nor bid her rise. His whole thoughts were filled
with her beauty, and the words she had spoken
fell unheeded on his ear. The unholy passion,
which had been smothered and not extinguished
in his breast, blazed forth afresh. Hitherto, he
had only seen Melanthe reserved and haughty,
sternly reproofing his impious advances, and with
marble coldness restraining every word and look.
But now the statue was warmed into life—he
beheld her at his feet ; and the heart of the licen-
tious Cardinal beat wildly, as he contemplated the
touching graces with which her new character of
suppliant had invested her. She was so perfectly
beautiful as she knelt before him, her whole being
animated with the passion of her entreaty, that the
sated fancy of the profligate Borgia beamed again

into freshness on imagining the possibility of gaining the affection of a creature so passionate and so true.

Wild as were the wishes that throbbed within his breast, they did not for an instant obscure the extraordinary perspicacity with which he was gifted. The heart of Melanthe was laid bare to his glance ; and he saw that, although fortune had thus led her to his feet, no feeling of love, or intention of compromise, had hastened her steps. Strong in her uprightness, and resolute in her duty, the noble girl was there to pray for a father's life ; and for that alone. Yet, at that very moment, while any one less monstrous than the man before

“It is strange,” observed Borgia, anxious to appear ignorant of a secret of which he had always been possessed ;—“it is most strange, that until now I never should have heard of his case. And he is alone ?”

“Alas ! no !” replied Melanthe ; “many others were confined with him at the same time ; but, with the exception of some few, their fate is unknown. Surely the mercy I implore for him will extend also to his companions,” she added timidly, for the horrors of the prison were still present to her mind.

“Doubtless,” answered the Cardinal, withdrawing his gaze from the face of Melanthe, as he beheld the blushes which covered it on perceiving his look of admiration ; “doubtless their claims to pardon will be carefully examined. The Holy Church is merciful—and I, as one of its Fathers, have some power. But,” he continued, changing his manner to one of secrecy and confidence, “were I to exert this power too openly, it might defeat its own end. Will you promise, that if I swear to liberate your father, the means by which his freedom has been obtained shall remain for ever a

secret? I would prove to you that the past is forgotten, and that no rancour dwells within the heart whose affection you rejected.—Will you promise what I ask?”

The air of Borgia was so true, his manner so free from any appearance of design or hesitation, that Melanthe, notwithstanding her distrust, was completely deceived by it.

“I will promise,” she said, “and may Heaven reward you for these words!”

“Have you no fear?” asked the Cardinal, wishing still more securely to engage her unre-sisting confidence; “have you no fear of the sincerity of one who had vowed to persecute

to his Creator for the uses of his power—could not be so cowardly, or so vile. Cardinal, I am not afraid ;” and Melanthe, as she spoke, filled with the elevation of soul engendered by the sublime consciousness of virtue, held out her hand to the Cardinal, in token of the confidence she reposed in his honour.

The lips of Borgia scarcely touched the fingers of Melanthe, as he bowed his head before her ; but the fire which rushed through his veins had nearly overpowered his reason. It was the delirium of passion, and anticipation of revenge, and not the sting of conscience, nor the pity of a relenting heart, which had momentarily mastered the spirit of the Cardinal. Soon recovering his wonted composure, he continued :—“ I am flattered by your assurance, and now, to put your veracity to the proof, I will pray you to recount to me the manner in which you contrived to penetrate the prison walls, hitherto deemed inaccessible to strangers.”

Melanthe, without hesitation, related to him the circumstances attendant upon her admission, accompanying the recital with an urgent entreaty that no blame should be imputed to Ramiro.

The Cardinal listened patiently, though at times a look of savage joy lighted up his features, as his eye glanced towards some object which lay upon his table. Melanthe, engrossed by her own anxiety, did not observe the movement, and concluded her recital with a prayer for the pardon of Ramiro, should the act of her admittance to the prison have been an infringement of its rules.

“He shall not only have pardon, but reward,” was the answer of Borgia, as, turning from Melanthe, to conceal the demoniacal smile which he could not suppress, he rang a small silver bell which lay upon a table beside him. The same secretary who had conducted Melanthe to the

had brought him early that morning to the palace of the Cardinal, he feared to implicate his benefactress in the danger which he instinctively felt was hanging over him. How was he astonished, when, instead of the censure and condemnation which his disobedience had merited, the Cardinal, addressing him in gentle tones, inquired how long he had been gaoler of St. Angelo?

“Twenty-five years,” replied Ramiro.

“Indeed,” observed the Cardinal, who had the peculiar talent of appearing surprised at what he best knew.

“It is a long time to have held the same office, and with unblemished fidelity.”

Ramiro, not deeming it prudent to criminate himself, merely bowed to this insinuated question; and the Cardinal went on. “The Holy Church is bountiful to such of her servants as she can implicitly trust; and the Signora,” pointing to Melanthe, “has assured us of the inviolable faith with which Ramiro ever watches over his prisoners. Some reward is due to such long service.”

" I humbly thank your Eminence," said Ramiro, who was too much overcome by the delight of having escaped so easily, to articulate more than was absolutely necessary.

" We will spare your thanks, my good friend," said the Cardinal, as the same smile, though strongly repressed, gleamed across his face ; " and your fidelity shall have its reward. Take this key, and unlock yonder cabinet. Within, you will find what will render you independent of all earthly cares."

Thus speaking, Borgia raised from the table a large golden key, the handle of which was set with jewels, and pointing to a cabinet of ebony, inlaid with marbles of various colours, which stood at the further end of the room, Ramiro advanced towards it, and inserted the key in the lock. For a few moments it resisted his endeavours to turn it, when Borgia, whose keen eye was fixed upon the old man, exclaimed,

" Press harder, my good Ramiro ; he who locks, should surely be able to unlock."

Ramiro obeyed his instructions. He pressed the key ; but, as it turned in the lock, and the

doors flew open, he started, and withdrew his hand, from which, on holding it up, a few drops of blood fell upon the floor.

"You have hurt yourself, I fear," said the Cardinal anxiously.

"No, it is nothing—a mere scratch, please your Eminence," answered Ramiro, at the same time putting his other hand to his forehead.

"The gold within the cabinet is yours," said Borgia, pointing to the now open doors.

"Where?" said Ramiro, stupidly.

"There, upon the shelves—do you not see it?" asked Borgia, advancing towards him.

"No! it is dark—so dark," said Ramiro, extending his arms, as if to support himself; and cold. "Help! help! - - -" he muttered, in smothered tones.

Melanthe sprung to his assistance; but ere she could cross the room, he had sunk upon the floor; and when she knelt by his side, and took his hand, it fell heavily from her grasp. With a shudder, she leant across, and placed her fingers upon the old man's heart—there was no pulse - - - Melanthe stealthily raising her eyes towards the Cardinal,

saw him wrap his hand in a handkerchief, as, with scrupulous care, he drew the golden key from the lock ; then by a secret spring the doors closed of themselves ; and the murderer smiled, as he threw a careless glance on the body of poor Ramiro, whose reward indeed had been greater than his desert - - -

“ We will leave Ramiro to the care of the physician,” said Borgia, in the softest tone, as he took the hand of Melanthe, to lead her from the apartment. Melanthe, stupified with horror, obeyed mechanically ; for, as her eye caught the features of the corpse already fixing into rigidity, she thought of the lonely dungeon of St. Angelo, and

CHAPTER III.

A FEW hurried words were all that now passed between the Cardinal and Melanthe. Receiving from Borgia the most solemn assurance that she would be conducted to a spot where, without danger, her father might immediately join her, she suffered herself to be placed within the litter, which, with its bearers, stood prepared in the hall of the palace. The curtains were drawn, and, sinking back upon the cushions, she resigned herself to the feeling of necessity which now alone urged her forward. The horrible scene which she had just witnessed, although she dared not positively affix to it the stigma of murder, had paralysed every power of resistance. She felt around her the deadly coils of the serpent, who needed but a symptom of fear, or shrinking, on the part of his victim, to crush her within his folds,

and passive obedience was all that now seemed left to her.

Thus far the design of Borgia had been crowned with success. To terrify where he could not at once subdue, was part of his system ; and although the atrocity of which he had just been guilty had been planned before the visit of Melanthe could have been anticipated, no sooner was she in his presence, than he determined that such an exhibition of his power could not fail of striking with awe the mind which had hitherto so bravely sustained itself against his threats.

The murder of Ramiro was only the prelude of many more, which history records of this san-

he should at length, together with Cesare, his son, of equal notoriety in infamy, perish miserably from incautiously drinking some poisoned wine, set apart for the destruction of three Cardinals, whose immense wealth, in the event of their death (it being forbidden to them to dispose of their possessions by will) reverted to the Holy See*.

The poisoned key was one of the favourite devices of Borgia. The poison was contained in the handle; and, as the lock of the cabinet was constructed expressly, a sharp pressure was necessary to open it; this effort moved a spring, which raised a little pointed tube, that, penetrating the skin, injected into the veins venom of a nature so subtle that instantaneous death was the consequence.

In those days, when might was law, and hypocrisy religion, none ventured to inquire farther. The physician of Borgia was summoned to view the corpse; and smiled as he beheld the

* The names of the three Cardinals were Casanova, Melchior Copis, and Adriano Castellense. The two last had only been recently created, and had paid to the Pope the enormous sum of 40,000 ducats as the price of their election.

potency of the drug he had himself compounded, and to which he owed the favour of the monster he served, who impiously daring to cover the deed he had done with the semblance of charity, always ordered masses to be sung for the soul of the deceased, and the expenses of the funeral to be defrayed out of his own purse. It was done ;—and if, within the secret recesses of the human breast, some spirit struggled to cry aloud, and curse the fiend beneath whose might it trembled, the dastard fear of torture and of death rose up, and froze the words upon his lips.

The discovery of Elphenor by Melanthe threatened to annihilate the plans which Borgia had

His projects of vengeance were laid aside, and, now certain of his prey, he waited, in security and silence, but the moment to bend her spirit to his will.

Melanthe was so deeply plunged in the lethargy of helplessness which her strange situation engendered, that, during the journey which had been thus unexpectedly forced upon her, she made no effort to discover towards what quarter of the city she was borne. Apparently the place of her destination was at some distance from the palace of the Cardinal, for, by the movement of her litter, she guessed that its bearers had more than once been changed. At length they stood still, and the curtains being withdrawn, she found herself at the door of an apartment, into which she was ushered with much courtesy by a grave and matronly personage, the kindness of whose manner somewhat re-assured her visitor. Further communication seemed, however, impossible, for upon addressing an inquiry to her companion relative to the situation of the house in which she now found herself, the woman shook her head, and muttered a few words in Spanish, a language unknown to Melanthe,

but which, from being the native tongue of Borgia, convinced her that the house to which she had been conducted belonged to him. The woman quitted the room, and soon returning, laid upon the table a variety of fruits and other refreshments, with wine, after which Melanthe remained alone.

Hour after hour glided by, and yet no tidings from the city reached her. At one moment she would chide her own impatience, and consider that the event for which she pined could not so speedily be accomplished ; and at another, she sat with uplifted head watching for every sound, as the haste with which she had been conducted to her present abode seemed to leave little doubt that the

ment she hopelessly sought for the door by which she had entered. Not a flaw was to be discovered in the rich hangings of crimson velvet which decorated the walls, and the borders, of jasper and gold, alike presented to the eye of Melanthe a surface so even and perfect, that she soon perceived it was not possible they could conceal an entrance to the room. This discovery filled her with uneasiness, and she now remarked, for the first time, the paintings which decorated the ceiling and the walls, and the general air of luxury pervading the apartment. The impression was peculiarly distasteful to her, and she returned to her seat and gave herself up to the sadness of her reflections. There was more of despondency in her heart than she would have dared to confess to herself at a time when she anticipated a reunion with her father ; but, from the moment when the dying glance of Ramiro had met her view, distrust had gone far to annihilate the confidence with which the words and manner of the Cardinal had before inspired her.

The day so eventful in the fate of Melanthe was now drawing to a close, the fitful blaze of the wood fire, and the glimmer of the stars through the high

windows had for some time alone lighted the apartment, when a sudden glare aroused its solitary inmate, and she turned her head just in time to see two of the large mirrors placed round the walls disappear as if by magic, ~~giving to view an alcove,~~ arranged with the most exquisite taste as a sleeping apartment. The soft light of the alabaster lamps fell upon the draperies of pale blue velvet, bordered with silver fringe; and Melanthe was still gazing with wonder at this sudden apparition, when the Spanish attendant, who had received her on her arrival, entered from the alcove, followed by a Moorish page, who presented sweetmeats and wine, while the woman busied herself with the arrangement of

The well-trained menials instantly disappeared; and Melanthe, letting fall the light curtain which shaded the alcove, threw herself upon the couch, and, worn out by the anxiety which she had so long endured, was soon asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME hours after Melanthe had found in repose a cessation of her care, a shadow passed across the almost transparent curtain which veiled the entrance to the alcove. It was the shadow of a human form : —noiselessly it had glided to the spot, and noiselessly it paused for a few seconds; then, as if

features before her; and then, as if unsatisfied, raised a small alabaster lamp, and turning its ray upon the couch, gently withdrew the covering which shaded the throat and arms of the sleeper. The hands of the young girl were crossed upon her breast; but so lightly, that its rise and fall were distinctly visible; and the rich vermilion of the full and slightly parted lips, the placid brow, with the deep shadow of the fringed eye-lids, betokened repose so tranquil, that none could have deemed a thought of sorrow or of guilt had ever found a moment's resting place within that breast

It was the sleep of innocence—of youth—of hope; and the beautiful being, who watched above, half smiled as she gazed admiringly upon it; but the smile was followed by a sigh, so heartfelt, that it changed for an instant the expression of a face naturally beaming with a gentle tenderness. Though apparently little older than Melanthe, the more rounded figure, and calm dignity of the stranger, gave her a somewhat more matronly air.

Her beauty was of a cast most rare in her land; for she was brilliantly fair, with eyes of the deepest

blue, and masses of chestnut hair falling in luxuriance upon her shoulders. The splendour of her dress; which was a robe of purple silk, bordered with silver and pearls, spoke of some festive scene which she appeared to have just quitted; but the look of sadness, which might be traced upon her lovely face, was at variance with her beauty and her state.

For a few moments only she paused in contemplation of the charms of the sleeper, which presented so strong a contrast to her own, then gently taking her hand, she drew it towards her. The movement awakened Melanthe, who, raising herself upon her couch, looked with a bewildered air

lady, gravely, while an air of distrust overspread her face.

“Not exactly; but I believe in the house of the Cardinal Borgia. I came hither by his orders, and under the expressed assurance that my father would be restored to liberty, and meet me here.”

“Where is your father? I thought you were the daughter of Hassan the merchant?”

“His daughter only by adoption,” replied Melanthe. “My father is Elphenor.”

“And who is Elphenor?” asked the lady.

“A Greek,” replied Melanthe. “He was the faithful friend and servant of Constantine. After the siege of Constantinople, he took refuge here, but was thrown into prison, where, for years, he has languished. It was only yesterday I knew that he lived. He bade me seek the Cardinal. I did so: he promised his instant release, and under that promise I am here.”

“Is this the fact?” asked the stranger, fixing a stern look upon Melanthe. “Had you no other motive?”

“None. Oh! do not say I have been deceived.

You spoke of danger," added Melanthe, looking round timidly. "Was it to me, or to my father?"

"To both," said the lady, gravely, "or to neither; it will depend upon yourself."

"Oh! speak," cried Melanthe; "tell me how I may avoid it, and my heart will bless you."

"Are you prepared to make the sacrifice required?"

"For any thing," exclaimed Melanthe, "to save my father, and avoid the - - -"

"Avoid the Cardinal," said the lady, quickly, as she observed the hesitation of Melanthe. "He has then persecuted you,—made offers of love, which you have rejected,—and you fear his power;" she

the lady grew ghastly pale, as, in a hoarse whisper, she added, "Is it that you love him, and that it is yourself you fear?"

The proud heart of Melanthe revolted at these words, from the interest with which she had at first regarded her companion.

"Who are you?" she said, gently; "and by what right do you thus question one who is a stranger to you?"

"A sinful and degraded being; and it is to prevent your becoming that which I am, that I have now sought you," answered the lady.

"Ah!" exclaimed Melanthe; and, as if by an instinctive movement, she withdrew her hand from that of her companion.

The cheek of the beautiful lady reddened; but there was no anger in her tone, as she exclaimed passionately, "Yes, shrink from me—despise me—but listen to me. If you would not one day curse the hour of your birth—yourself—the world, ay, even the beauty of your children, smiling to your eyes, lest it should lead them to become the same wretched thing as yourself."

"Forgive me; oh! forgive me," said Melanthe,

kindly pressing the hand of the stranger within her own. For a few moments, the sobs of the unhappy woman alone broke the silence; but recovering herself, she said,

“ You ask me who I am? Alas! could I feel joy, it would be to find that one being in Rome knows not the name of the wretched Vanozia! Would you hear my tale? Or, do these tears speak plainly enough the sorrow it contains?”

“ If sympathy can soothe it—then speak,” said Melanthe, whose heart bled for the unhappiness of the beautiful creature who seemed so deeply to feel her situation.

“ I will speak,” she said, endeavouring so stifle her sobs, “ though for years I have suffered in silence. Yes, young as I am, ten years have passed, since I listened to the deceiving words of him who has this day lured you hither. I was an orphan and his ward—nobly born as himself; and I loved him with a love that can end but in the grave. We were married. Yes,” she repeated, as she observed the sudden start of Melanthe, at the word, ‘ Married!’ “ Lulled by his assurances that a dispensation from the Pope had been granted in our favour, we

were married, and for some time lived in Spain, shut out from the world. His uncle, the Pope, summoned him to Rome. We came ; and soon—oh, how soon I awoke from the dream of joy in which, as a wife and a mother, I had passed delicious years, to find,” she continued, as, drawing nearer to the ear of Melanthe, and grasping her hand, as if in agony, she lowered her voice almost to a whisper, “I had been deceived—to find my children cut off from their rights, and myself a mistress, not a wife!—and a mistress neglected and unloved.”

“Alas! what bitter grief!” said Melanthe, whose tears flowed fast for a fate apparently so undeserved.

“Bitter indeed—bitter in its grandeur as in its desolation! Bitter, when the pampered menial, and greedy sycophant, bow beneath my feet—dreadful, when, in the solemn stillness of the night, the soft winds, as they pass, seem to breathe the curse of God upon a love forbidden by His word! Bitter, to think upon my sin—but maddening to behold the indifference of him for whose sake I am thus wretched. Oh! ye who vainly dream that man is grateful for the love ye give, take warning by me!

The love that is unholy is cursed of God! and, cherish it as you will, day by day shall ye behold it fade before your eyes—day by day shall ye watch, with every nerve strung to madness, over your perishing treasure; and the spirit that would remonstrate, and the lip that would complain, shall quiver and sink beneath the blast of indifference, and the crushing weight of satiety!”

Vanozia paused, overcome by the picture she had drawn of her own fate, and, burying her face in her hands, wept aloud. Melanthe, whose generous mind could well sympathize with the sufferings of a modest and virtuous nature, thus tortured by the weakness of passion and the sense of sin, raised

wife, and faithful I will always remain; and—besides—deceived as I have been, I love him—still.”

Melanthe, who saw that in these words lay the real weight of the tie, which to her mind ought to have been dissolved, upon the discovery of its unholy nature, endeavoured to combat the resolution of Vanozia, by exposing to her the sophistry of her own arguments; but all was vain. The mind of the unhappy woman was too much weakened by a gnawing consciousness of her fault, to struggle against her grief; and Melanthe forbore to insist, when she saw conviction was hopeless, and could only offer up a secret prayer that power from above might be given to poor Vanozia, so to separate in her misery the consequences from the crime, that the spirit of true repentance might enter into her heart! For a few moments, neither of those, who had thus suddenly been made friends by their misfortunes, could find courage to speak, until Vanozia starting exclaimed,

“Fool—fool, that I am, to waste the present time in talking of the past. I came to save you, and my selfish grief has led me from my path.

But," she continued, again fixing upon Melanthe a look of distracted fear, "what if you too should have deceived me? if you should be my enemy?"

"Do not give way to such a thought," said Melanthe, who trembled lest Vanozia should again question her as to the conduct of Borgia towards her. "Do not suspect me, but point out the road for my escape from the danger to which you say I am exposed, and I will at once follow your advice."

"Will you leave Rome instantly? Yes, within this hour, and for ever?" asked Vanozia.

"Never!" cried Melanthe; "you forget my father lies in a dungeon; who shall aid him, if I abandon him?"

“ I am a stranger—why should I trust you ? ” asked Melanthe.

“ But I would save you,” said Vanozia. “ A little while, and it may be too late. You know not what you risk, nor would I sully your maiden ear by a recital—but have you no fear—no fear,” she continued anxiously, as again a jealous pang shot through her heart, “ that you may be taught to love—that he who has persuaded others may also persuade you - - - ”

“ No,” interrupted Melanthe, “ of that I have no fear. I have a talisman—a safeguard—I love another ! ”

The burst of tears with which Vanozia received this declaration, too plainly told the violence of the feelings which she had striven to repress. The extravagance of joy which broke forth, as her worst fears were dispelled, would have terrified Melanthe, had she too not known the strength of that passion which at times defies reason or control ; and she gazed with pity upon the wretched woman, whose chance of happiness was so small, that even the removal of an unwilling rival from her path was a source of transport to her.

The mutual distrust of Vanozia and Melanthe had now vanished ; and the former hastily detailed the plan by which she calculated upon securing the release of Elphenor. Her power over the Cardinal was unbounded, with the exception of the one point, for which she would have sacrificed all others ; and Vanozia, whose disposition was naturally amiable and good, continued to the end of her days to interpose between Borgia and his victims. Before long, she had contrived to prove the truth of her assertions ; and Melanthe humbly lifted up her heart to Heaven for the timely succour which had so unexpectedly reached her.

At first she hesitated as to the expediency of

departure from Rome, Melanthe suffered Vanozia to make the preparations for her journey, which the hurry of the moment required. The disguise of a peasant had been procured by her ; and Melanthe, covering her own dress with the loose robe and mantle which would effectually prevent her from being recognised, soon stood ready for departure. Aware of the danger to which poverty might expose her during her journey, Vanozia had clasped the pearls which she wore round the neck of the poor girl, who was thus compelled to fly unaided from the storm ; and giving her also a purse of gold, she carefully repeated the instructions as to the path she was to follow on quitting the house, to enable her to find the horses and attendants which Vanozia had prepared for her flight.

“ And now,” said Vanozia, when all was ready, “ a few hours will place you beyond danger ;—and then, whither will you go ? ”

“ To Florence,” said Melanthe ; and the deep blush which dyed her cheek again brought comfort to the heart of Vanozia, for she thought of Lorenzo de’ Medici, and of his recent visit to Rome. Not

having questioned Melanthe as to the object of her affection, she naturally concluded, from the readiness of her answer, that Lorenzo was the person.

Joy is sometimes selfish as well as grief. In the delight of finding that the inclination of Melanthe so fully seconded her own desires, Vanozia forgot to inquire further into the future plans or hopes of Melanthe; and having agreed with her as to an appointed plan of communication, which the acquaintance of Vanozia with the localities of Florence enabled her to form, she led her from the room, and taking a key from her girdle she opened a panel in the wall leading to a private staircase.

the fate of poor Vanozia ; but her wretchedness had not yet reached its height, and dark were the days that were in store for her, when the three children of whom she was the doating mother, should vie with each other in the commission of crimes so appalling, that even the black deeds of their father paled before the horrible vices of his offspring.

CHAPTER V.

ALTHOUGH trembling with fear and haste, and with scarcely sufficient light to guide her on her way, Melanthe could not forbear pausing to look back upon the house she had just quitted. The outline of a high wall was all she could distinguish. In vain did she endeavour to trace some form of tower or gateway, by which she imagined she might

Unappalled by a circumstance which would have struck terror to the heart of many, Melanthe continued steadily to advance, actually groping her way with outstretched arms, until the tediousness of such a progress made the distance appear double what she had been taught to expect. Still, such was the confidence with which the earnestness and truth of Vanozia had inspired her, that not for a moment did she doubt or hesitate, and was soon rewarded for her courage by the sound of voices. She prudently paused to listen ; but the stamping of the horses upon the hard ground betokened their impatience, and Melanthe, hastily drawing near, exclaimed, as she had been desired by Vanozia,

“ Nicolo, are the horses ready ?”

“ Yes, Signora, they have been so for more than two hours,” was the ready answer.

“ And Giannetta ?” inquired Melanthe.

“ She is ready mounted, behind yon thicket,” replied Nicolo, as he struck some sparks from a flint, and lighted a small lamp ; but Melanthe, secure from all mistake, begged him to extinguish the light, and having, by his assistance, mounted

her horse, proceeded with her companions across the Campana.

For many hours they pursued their journey almost in silence, Melanthe only inquiring from time to time the distance they had gained, and whether, amidst the darkness, Nicolo was sure of his road. But the answers she received soon quieted all fear upon the subject. The path seemed as familiar to Nicolo by night as by day; and it was with a gesture of pride, which provoked

smile from Melanthe, that, as a faint gleam lighted up the East, he pointed to the outline of a dense wood, which he had frequently mentioned during the darkness as a fitting resting place. Beneath the shade of its trees the travellers remained for some hours; and then, mounting their horses, continued their journey. A few hours ride brought them to the small town of Civita Castellana, where, in a house situated in one of the most obscure streets, they sought shelter for the night.

Here they were detained for many days by the severe illness of Melanthe. The violent excitement

she had lately undergone, added to the exertion of a hurried journey, brought on a fever, by which she was so much weakened, that, when at length she recovered, it became obvious to Nicolo, who felt himself responsible for her safety, that it would be utterly impossible for her to proceed upon her journey with the same rapidity as at first. The injunctions of Vanozia, and the immense bribe by which she had secured the services and promised silence of himself and Giannetta, had impressed upon the mind of Nicolo a vast idea of the importance of his charge; and during the illness of Melanthe he had scarcely absented himself for a moment from the dwelling she inhabited.

It was not, therefore, without considerable alarm that he perceived that, both by night and day, a solitary figure hovered within sight, yet without ever approaching sufficiently near the house for him to distinguish more than the large cloak and riding hat which was constantly worn by travellers of all descriptions. But to discover the station or business of the stranger formed no part of the intentions of Nicolo. His orders were

to protect Melanthe from danger, and to conduct her whithersoever she might wish to go; and as he had already been informed by her that Florence was the place of her destination, he required no further directions, and prepared to set out the moment she should be sufficiently recovered.

It was, however, more than a fortnight ere the travellers again pursued their journey; and the patience of Nicolo was almost exhausted by repeated disappointments, for the strength of Melanthe seemed to fluctuate without any apparent reason, and more than once she had been obliged to return to her bed upon the very day named for their departure. At length they quitted the town

in discovering Montesecco ! and should the intelligence which she expected to receive from Vanozia respecting the liberation of Elphenor, not prove as satisfactory as her words had led her to hope, Melanthe determined to appeal to the promised friendship of Lorenzo de' Medici, and entreat his interference with the Pope in behalf of her father. Uninformed of the events that had occurred during her seclusion, she little thought that she was flying for protection to one whom the Pope now regarded as a bitter enemy. Happy in her ignorance of the impending tragedy, Melanthe journeyed on, recalling to mind the many noble traits she had admired in the character of Lorenzo, and building upon the faith she had experienced of his lofty nature a certainty of generous forgiveness for her rejection of his love, and a comforting anticipation of succour.

Far different were her reflections as her mind turned to the Cardinal ; and she pictured to herself his rage upon the discovery of her evasion. The veil had now fallen from her eyes. The appearance of the beautiful and unhappy Vanozia, whose sorrow and degradation had brought forcibly before

her the picture of her own fate, had fear or weakness induced her to listen to Borgia, proved to Melanthe that the step she had now taken was the only one in which she could hope for safety. The horrible character of him from whom she fled, stood out in all its naked deformity ; and as she recollected the interview which had taken place between them in the convent of the Speranza, she shuddered to think that the same delusion of a false and impossible marriage, had already effected the misery of a being so naturally innocent as Vanozia appeared to be. Thankful to have escaped a danger so fearful and dark, Melanthe once more

would only be increased by delay, she at once determined to proceed, hoping to reach before nightfall, a small inn of which Nicolo had spoken, and which was only a few miles distant.

The beautiful scenery of the Appenines was new to Melanthe, and as she rode forward, she forgot her fatigue in the delight she experienced at the splendid views which opened before her. They had soon reached a point from which she could look back upon the vast expanse of country which she had traversed. Before her, were the defiles of the mountains; and above her head, in all the majesty of their grandeur, towered forests of pine and oak, from the masses of which stood out the moss-grown crags of gigantic though picturesque forms. Struck by the enchanting beauty of the spot, Melanthe had reined up her horse, and stood for a short time inquiring from the attentive and intelligent Nicolo the names of the principal points of view, when, just as she turned her horse's head to proceed, a sharp whistle caused the animal to start. Nicolo sprung to her side; but scarcely had he seized her rein, when another whistle from below was answered from either side, and in an instant a

score of armed men rushed from the thickets, and the travellers were surrounded.

“The Brigands! Mercy — Mercy,” screamed Giannetta, as she endeavoured to force her horse forwards, or backwards, or any way in which he might contrive to extricate her from the ferocious looking band by which they were encircled; but all was vain. Whichever way she turned, a dagger was raised before her eyes; and it soon became obvious to her, although bewildered by terror, that her best course was to follow the example of Melanthe, and quietly to submit, where resistance was useless.

Hitherto, the demeanour of the brigands had been marked by the most gentle deference towards her, several having stood passively round, while one only laid his hand upon her rein : but the instant she attempted to offer any resistance, the scene changed ; and, on a sign from their chief, four men sprung forward, and seizing the bridle, forced the horse of Melanthe to advance rapidly in an opposite direction from that in which she had been travelling ; while, as she turned a despairing glance towards her companions in misfortune, she perceived that they also were compelled to quit their road, and take a side path which appeared to lead up the mountain. Even in that moment of terror, when breathless with excitement from the suddenness of the attack, Melanthe found time to envy the destination of all not forced to follow the same road as herself ; for, in answer to her repeated entreaties that they would tell her to what part of the world they were thus so forcibly hurrying her, the man, who appeared to act as chief of the party, had pointed forwards, and uttered the single word “ Rome ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

THE sickness of despair fell upon the heart of Melanthe, as the idea of returning to the spot polluted by the presence of the Cardinal entered her mind. The hope which had sustained her during her flight died away, as she contemplated the certain danger and difficulty which would attend her restoration to the power of her enemy. So convinced was she now of the almost miraculous influence exercised by Borgia, that she felt that once again within the walls of Rome, escape would be impossible. And she trembled, and shrunk, at the thought of the solitary house and the warnings of Vanozia, till, from the future, she turned her thoughts to the present.

So absorbing had been the anticipation of her fate, that she had scarcely observed the conduct of those who had thus suddenly become its arbiters. She found herself closely surrounded by twelve

armed men, whose picturesque costume led her to suppose that they were the Brigands of whom she had heard so much, but who seldom ventured near enough to the city to be recognised. He, who seemed the chief in command, was in no way distinguished by his dress from his companions; and Melanthe, gathering from some expressions which escaped him, as she endeavoured to draw him into conversation, that they only formed part of a body, gazed anxiously round, in the hope of discovering, in any change of position, some chance of escape.

They had quitted the road by which she had ascended the mountain; and although still advancing in the direction of Rome, she perceived that they had turned considerably to the right, and had entered a narrow defile overhung by a dense wood. The object of their route soon became apparent, for after little more than an hour's riding, the same shrill whistle she had heard at the moment of her capture was repeated, and in an instant afterwards several bandits sprung from their cover, and the little party was surrounded. All eyes were rivetted on their captive; but the demeanour of the

brigands was so different from that which she had often heard ascribed to them, that Melanthe, filled with wonder, forgot her fears; and as she beheld the inquisitive, but yet not disrespectful glances cast upon her by the dark browed desperadoes around, and listened to the deferential language of him whom she now easily recognised as their Captain, as he assured her that she should be treated with all the care and courtesy which was in their power to bestow, felt as though some secret talisman had suddenly been entrusted to her, by which these wild spirits of the mountain had been soothed into an unnatural calm.

Although relieved from immediate fear, a sense

displayed for an instant to the eyes of the Captain the magnificent pearls which Vanozia had clasped round her neck. The brigand turned a hasty glance upon the jewels, yet only shook his head, and Melanthe replaced the pearls within her dress. Quick as had been the movement, it had not passed unobserved ; but the presence of their Captain restrained the men to a strict attention to their duty, and the party continued to move onwards.

“ Tell me, at least, whither you are leading me,” said Melanthe aloud, hoping to attract the attention of some of those by whom she was guarded.

“ Lady, we are forbidden to answer questions,” said the man who had at first conducted her ; but his words were uttered in a low voice, as if afraid that he might be overheard by his Chief.

“ But must it be to Rome ?” asked Melanthe, in a tone of distress.

The word caught the ear of the Captain, who, turning fiercely round, exclaimed, casting a threatening look upon his followers, “ Who spoke of Rome ? Corpo di Christo, can ye not listen to a woman’s questions, and be silent ? Let the first who speaks look to his head ; and you, Lady,” he added,

endeavouring to soften his tone, "be advised, and submit quietly. Fate is stronger than will; and the power of the Pope is stronger than either."

With these ambiguous words, and a gesture which very expressively declined further conversation, the Captain strode forward, dragging, rather than leading, the jaded horse of Melanthe. It was almost dark, when she perceived that they were about to cross a shallow rapid mountain stream, which bounded and dashed amongst huge fragments of fallen rock that obstructed its course. They passed it in safety; then, having scrambled for upwards of a mile, along a steep road on the

“ Not there—for pity sake, not there !” she exclaimed, as all the horrors of murder and violence, of which she had heard, rushed to her mind. “ Let me remain in the open air.”

A look of contempt at a request which appeared to him so childish, was all the answer the brigand chief vouchsafed ; still it was with no ungentle hand that he led her forwards ; and pushing aside the boughs which hung from the rock, he entered the cave, and threw some brushwood upon the glowing embers. A bright flame instantly lighted up the interior, and, with some appearance of courtesy, the Captain placed a stool by the fire, and entreated Melanthe to be seated. A moment after, steps were heard approaching, and an old woman entered ; but at the first glance, her hideous aspect so terrified Melanthe, that she turned away her head, and before she could again gather courage to look round, the Brigand Chief was gone. A murmur rung in her ears of threats, and oaths, and fierce wrangling ; but her bewildered senses had not enabled her to collect the import of what she had heard ; and to address any inquiry to the withered and savage looking creature who had been

summoned to attend upon her, promised to Melanthe little more chance of a satisfactory explanation than if she had breathed her prayers to the rocks above and around her.

It seemed, however, no part of the design of the strange power into which she had fallen to treat her with harshness or disrespect ; for her new guardian, who informed Melanthe that her name was Tere-sina, was, in her rude way, attentive and even courteous towards her, and brought food and wine, and offered to remove the heavy cloak in which she was still shrouded. This, Melanthe peremptorily declined. The jewels which she wore were one
important to her, but the secret here that in

When she awoke, the morning light streamed in from the natural door-way, formed by the rock, and the first object which met her eyes, was the form of Teresina, extended upon the ground, close by her side. She was fast asleep. A natural impulse to escape, although she knew not where to go, urged Melanthe to make the attempt. She raised herself cautiously from her bed, and stole past the sleeper with the tread of a fairy. In an instant she stood before the door; but the heavy grating with which it was secured, resisted her utmost endeavours to move it; and then she marvelled how she could have imagined that a spot so exposed to probable danger as was the stronghold of the brigands should be left unguarded. Not only was the door firmly fastened, but a thick chain, apparently fixed in the roof, was passed diagonally through rings rivetted to the grating, and a huge padlock secured the whole to another iron ring, embedded in the foot of the rock. She turned away with a feeling of hopelessness, and grown accustomed to the light of the cavern, examined its various recesses, which had hitherto escaped her observation. All was in order,—an order which

but augmented her fears, for it spoke the haunt of a well-trained and organized band. The niches, which apparently had been hollowed from the rocky walls, were filled with articles telling the trade of their owners—swords, matchlocks, and poniards, were there in abundance, and stores of ammunition were piled by their side; while, on the top of a large wooden chest, Melanthe discovered dresses of all kinds, even of a costly description :—caps, with feathers, and tassels of gold, and masks and visors, sufficient to accomplish the disguise of the whole troop to which they belonged.

Further on, were bridles, saddles, and horse armour, and innumerable boxes, casks, stores of

rendered still more gaunt and withered by the blue light of the coming day. And yet a trace of grand though masculine beauty might still be detected, as a calm, now unnatural from habit, softened the fierceness of the lines, with which long indulgence in every passion disgraceful to her sex, had stamped the face of the sleeper. She was one, who in early days had been the delight, but was now almost the terror of the wild troop, who seldom owned law, save that of their own mad will. Her long grisly hair was bound up somewhat fantastically with a handkerchief of scarlet cloth, and displayed a brow and form of head of bold and classical outline. Though the eyes were closed, an air of reckless defiance sat upon her face; and Melanthe shuddered on beholding her grasp convulsively the long clasp knife which she had evidently placed by her side before retiring to rest. The movement seemed so habitual, that the poor girl felt faint with terror, as she thought of having passed the night with such a companion; and creeping gently past her, she seated herself close to the door, and endeavoured to examine the prospect without; but the light was scarcely strong enough to admit of

her doing so. Wistfully she gazed through the iron bars, yet she thought even less of her own fate than the distress and danger it might entail upon those so dear to her; and the tears that stole down her cheeks, were chiefly called forth by recollections of the only prison which she had ever before visited.

Alas! what were the bars against which she leaned, compared to those behind which her wretched father, for years, had groaned. Would the door ever open to restore him to the light of day, or had she found him but to part for ever? These thoughts weighed heavily on her spirit; yet, amidst the gloom which oppressed her still strug-

reward. Till then, through danger and through grief, she would endure on—patient and firm, in the blessed certainty that the heart she prized above all treasures of the earth held communion with her own, and with the spirit of love watched over her even from afar.



CHAPTER VII.

SOMEWHAT soothed by the current of her reflections, Melanthe sat for a little time in perfect stillness behind her prison door, looking out calmly upon the scene before her, as each moment some new object started into life beneath the gleam of the coming day. The door of the cavern was shaded from without by the fern and lichens springing from the crevices of the rock ; but it was so arranged, that, through the branches of a straggling oak which flung itself from above, a distinct view could be obtained of the only side upon which the hiding-place of the brigands could be approached. A small space had been cleared at a little distance, and the freshness of its verdure gave it the appearance of a lawn in the midst of the forest.

Melanthe remembered that the path by which

she had reached her present abode skirted this opening, and naturally her eye reverted continually to the spot connected in her mind with a chance of escape, however difficult or remote. She examined every tree, and every branch, in the hope of recognising some that might enable her to trace the intricate windings of the road ; but the mass of foliage was so dense that she could not succeed. As the light increased, she fancied more than once that a figure flitted about on the margin of the wood, and her heart beat quickly as she made the discovery ; yet it was with fear, for, encaged as she was, and probably closely surrounded by the whole of the gang into whose power she had fallen, what chance could there be of succour or escape ? The appearance of mystery is generally an excitement, and Melanthe soon found herself watching with intense interest for the re-appearance of the form she had, or at least imagined she had seen.

But nothing came again—not a leaf of the lower branches stirred, and she began to think she must have been deceived, when a movement of one of the lichens, which hung like creepers from the rock above, caused her to look up, and through the

grating she saw the eyes of a human being glaring down upon her. The lower part of the face was completely muffled, the slouched hat concealed the hair and forehead so that nothing was visible save two dark piercing eyes ; and Melanthe, without knowing why, trembled from head to foot, and springing from her place, aroused Teresina by a cry of fear which echoed through the cave.

“ How now ? ” she exclaimed, “ what is the matter ? Are the soldiers upon us ? ”—and shaking off the hold of Melanthe, the woman raised the clasp knife she held in her hand, and sprung from her sleeping posture with an agility which her years would seem to have forbidden.

“ Look there,” said Melanthe, pointing to the rock, without lifting her own eyes to the spot.

“ Where ? what ? ” asked the woman, at the same time feeling in her girdle for the key of the padlock, which to her satisfaction she found was still in its usual place.

“ What did you see ? ” again she asked, in surprise.

“ I don’t know—a man, I believe,” said Melanthe.

“ A man ! ” echoed the woman ; “ only a man ! ”

and she laughed with a ferocious wildness that frightened her captive still more.

“ And may I ask what else the Signora expected to see in these mountains ? ” she added ; and the reasonableness of the question struck Melanthe, who blushed at the almost childish terror she had shown. The woman, who appeared to have very little curiosity upon the subject, looked once through the grating, and, not perceiving any one, proceeded to make some arrangements in the interior of the cave ; and having lighted a fire, she spread some food upon a table, then unlocking the door, seemed disposed to go out ; but Melanthe observing the movement sprung to her side, exclaiming,

“ Do not leave me here—alone—have pity on me ! ”

“ Pity,” echoed Teresina with a stare, as if she did not comprehend the word.

“ Yes—listen to my prayer,—help me to escape, and I will make you rich for life.”

“ Have you gold ? ” said the woman, whose eyes sparkled at the word ; and, as she spoke, she looked cautiously round, and then approached her captive.

"Yes! yes!" replied Melanthe. "And you shall have it all, if you will only let me go. See here," and she raised the long sleeve of her robe, and showed the glittering bracelet she wore; "you shall have this also—you will be so rich—only leave the chain unfastened—I ask no more. I will hide in the woods, until - - -"

"Poor child!" said the woman, apparently touched by the earnest manner of Melanthe, "they would hunt you like dogs - - - but the gold?"

"Here, take it," said Melanthe; and she drew forth her purse, and poured its contents into the lap of the avaricious old woman, whose fingers trembled as she clutched each piece separately, and

“ Take it, and I will pray to the Holy Saints to guard you—only allow me to quit this place.”

“ We might escape together to-night, in the darkness,” said the old woman musingly ; “ I know every turn of the forest ; but then, what should I do in the city or the plain ? I who so love the mountains—and even this cave—I have been here for forty years ! ” and with a selfishness common to age, she seemed to tremble at the idea of a change in long-established habits,—even while she groaned under the tyranny with which she was constantly treated by the ruder spirits of the gang.

“ You would have a cottage of your own—you would be happy—and blessed for the good action you have done,” suggested Melanthe.

“ A cottage—and a vineyard such as I have seen on the plain ? and wine—plenty of good wine—and no curses—no blows—nothing but eating and drinking—wine every day,” said the woman, with a wild fervour of delight that disgusted Melanthe.

“ Would you not be glad to leave this dreadful life ? ” she urged timidly.

“ Dreadful,” echoed the woman with an offended air; “ it is a noble life, a grand life—one not to be exchanged for the Pope’s kingdom; but,” she added, coming closer to Melanthe, and grinding her teeth with a look of concentrated rage, “ that is for the chiefs. They take all—all; and I their servant—their slave—am left to starve. Yes, often I have had nothing for days to eat, but the acorns from the forest; and when they come back, the devils in hell cannot torture more fiercely if they find not food and wine, and it pleases them to say I had all when they left me. Look here—and here,” and putting aside her dress she showed the marks of what appeared to be deep wounds on

“ Yes, horrible !” repeated the woman ; “ nothing but blows and kicks, and usage not fit for a dog ; but I have sworn to be revenged, and if we go I will tell you what I will do. I will lay a train, and blow all their treasures about their ears,” and she grinned with delight at the idea.

“ Do not talk of vengeance,” said Melanthe soothingly, “ leave vengeance to Heaven !”

“ Heaven ! now hear how she talks ! as if Heaven would trouble itself about such a poor miserable wretch as I am.”

“ May God forgive her !” said Melanthe, horrified at the impious words.

“ No,” continued the woman ; “ other folks may trust to such means, but I will revenge myself ; and when I am gone, let them say what they will—and do what they will with anything of mine they can find ; they may roast in the fire all that belongs to Teresina—they may - - -” but here, as if seized by some horrible convulsion, she stopped, stretched out her clenched hands, while every feature was contracted with an expression of agony that froze the heart of Melanthe.

For some moments a deep short sob was all

that betokened existence in the stricken frame; and, breathless with anxiety, Melanthe continued to watch for the return of the blood to the sunken cheek and livid lips of the old woman. At length the muscles seemed to relax from their rigidity, a gleam of consciousness shown in the fixed and glassy eyes, and slowly drawing up her arms as though shivering from cold, Teresina crossed her dark withered hands upon her breast.

“My son,” she said, in a low hoarse whisper, “my son—I had forgotten. If I go, they will think it is to betray them—they will torture him—put out his eyes as they did to the Jew last week
tear his flesh with pinners and strip the skin

fury of a maniac swung back the heavy grating, and securing it from the outside with the chain, which she locked, she hurried from the cave.

The voice of Nature had triumphed. The one feeling of the woman had trampled the demon spirit to the earth, but with it the last hope of Melanthe lay crushed! The sudden revulsion of feeling occasioned by disappointment is, of all the painful emotions incidental to the human state, one of the most difficult to endure. The effort of a great sacrifice will, to nobler minds, impart some feeling of satisfaction in compensation for the hard self-denial exacted; and resignation will soften an anticipated sorrow, until it loses much of its poignancy; but the suddenness of an unlooked for disappointment overwhelms and stuns the sanguine spirit. At once the bright flowers of hope are laid low, as the blossoms of the meadow fall beneath the scythe, and, like them, they seem cut off for ever.

So elated had Melanthe felt by the manner with which Teresina had at first received the proposal of flight, that it was not for some time that she could believe in the meaning of the frenzied words

uttered by the unhappy woman just before her disappearance. But one by one they came back upon the ear of the captive. She looked around. She was alone ; and going to the door of the cavern, she saw the chain, and tried the lock ; it was fast ; and Melanthe gazed at the waving woods, beneath which she had hoped that night to find a shelter—then turned to her prison—to weep !

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL that day Melanthe remained alone; and when evening brought back Teresina to her post, the unhappy prisoner saw at a glance that an air of dogged resolution had replaced the fierceness which at their first meeting had struck her as the characteristic expression of the countenance of her gaoler. Certain of repulse, she forbore to implore further; and Teresina, perhaps touched by the gentleness of her captive, refrained from all allusion to the scene of the morning. Little was heard in that dark cavern, save the low sobs of the poor girl; and when night came, she lay down upon her pallet, more to avoid the vigilance of Teresina, than from any hope of obtaining repose. Apparently satisfied with the submission of her prisoner, Teresina soon followed her example; but before she did so, Melanthe remarked that she drank long and deeply of some liquid, which she took from a small cask

which stood in the interior of the cave. Disgusted by the sight, Melanthe turned her head away, and soon the heavy breathing of the old woman told that she slept.

But to the weary eyelids of the captive, sleep came not ; and, to relieve the tedium of the hours, she left her pallet, and placing a stool close to the grating, sat down, and sorrowfully gazed through her prison bars upon the moonlight scene. The angle of the rock at one side, threw the entrance to the cavern into deep shade ; beyond, all was distinctly visible, and so still was the night, that the murmur of the mountain stream, which she knew was at a great distance below, fell clearly upon her ear. Vain would it be to tell the desolation of heart which froze up every faculty, as the poor captive sat thus encaged by a ruffian band in their mountain stronghold, scarcely daring to conjecture what might be her future fate, and yet dreading to look back lest the shadow of past grief might lengthen as she looked. Thus benumbed as it were by sorrow, she sat for some hours, when she was suddenly aroused by the sound of whispering voices. It ceased ; and remembering the unnecessary display

of fear which had been caused that morning by what she now considered a delusion, she abstained from awakening Teresina, and remained in her former position. The sound returned. The speakers had evidently approached close to the angle of the rock ; she could see their shadows as they stood ; and the first words they uttered took from Melanthe all power to move.

“ I tell thee, Carlo,” said one of them, “ it must be done to-night. To-morrow, the Captain will return, and then farewell to any chance for us.”

“ He cannot be here by to-morrow,” was the reply. “ You talk as if he had nothing to do but to walk straight to the Pope’s palace, and claim the reward offered for the capture of a runaway nun and a heretic. You forget, there is a price set upon his own head ; and to treat through a third person, requires time.”

“ Others might want it, but he will do without it ; and a free pardon is promised to all who may have a hand in bringing her back.”

“ After all, she may not be the person,” observed Carlo, who appeared more inclined to procrastinate than suited the views of his companion.

"She is no other, or my name is not Tomaso," said the first speaker angrily. "Have I not, from the hour when the proclamation of the Pope, signed by the Cardinal Borgia, was distributed all over the country, traced her very steps, till she must needs fall sick at Civita Castellana, and lose me the reward by letting the Captain get hold of the news. But it's always the way," he added, in a sulky tone, "we work—and the chiefs profit by it: I should like to know what becomes of their oath to share all alike—we hear little enough of that after we have once joined the troop."

"Poor Tomaso!" said Carlo laughing; "but

is a bargain—the woman and her jewels are our joint property.”

A groan that appeared to come from the rock against which they leaned, made the robbers start, but it was not repeated; and Carlo, upon whom the charms of Melanthe had made a very vivid impression, continued,

“ You had better take my offer; renounce the girl, or I fling over the precipice the file I had brought to open the lock; and I don’t think you will persuade Teresina to unfasten the door.”

“ Fling it, then, and yourself after it,” roared Tomaso; “ but, by God and the saints, you shall keep to the bargain.”

“ Devil! thou art not fit even to look at her,” exclaimed Carlo, in a voice of rage.

“ And you,” said Tomaso, sneeringly, as he snapped his fingers in the face of his companion. The sound of a sharp blow was the answer, and in an instant the robbers were engaged in a deadly struggle.

Melanthe, starting with a loud cry from her seat, clung to the bars of her prison, as she beheld the fierce encounter of the ruffians; but her shriek was

unheard by those whose fury could alone be appeased by blood. With frantic energy each pressed upon the other, twining, in a death grapple, the arms of his opponent, striving who should first draw the knife from his belt. For a few moments the deadly struggle was not unequal, when Tomaso, who had the advantage in stature, having gained a slight elevation of ground, by a desperate effort released his arms from the grasp of his adversary, and rushing upon him with wild fury, hurled him with one tremendous blow upon the ground. He fell upon the sharp rock almost at the mouth of the cavern; and such was the violence of the shock, that his forehead was completely smashed by it.

different eyes. It might betray the deed ; and the laws of the brigands were severe in case of murder amongst their band. Something must be done, and that instantly. He took up the body in his arms—the warm body of his former friend and comrade ; but steeled to all compunction, by a long life of violence and blood, the ferocious spirit of Tomaso did not quail, as the still pliant limbs of his victim now hung helplessly towards the earth. He only sought to shield his garments from the red stream which burst afresh as he lifted the corpse. And now he stands upon the edge of the precipice—he looks cautiously from the dizzy height, then moves forward a few steps, as though to gain a better footing ; he pauses—his burden glides from his arms, and the weak branches of the underwood crash beneath the falling weight—and then a dead, sullen sound. To-morrow, who shall say how came that mangled corpse upon the path below ?

There was a fearful silence. Still leaning from the edge of the rock, the murderer seemed listening to the second death of his victim, while his eye followed the movement of the tall fern and the branches, as they settled to their former places,

springing, one by one, from the sudden bend they had received.

And Melanthe saw this also ! But is it a vision of her reeling brain—or has Heaven already sent a ghastly phantom to dog the murderer's steps? No !—It is a human form—a form of flesh and blood, and sinew, that glides, spirit-like, across the blood-stained grass ; yet with a tread so noiseless the murderer does not turn his head. His soul is in the depth below—he is looking on his crime, and does not see the hand Heaven guides above his guilty head. One blow --- the tottering feet have passed the edge—they slip upon the smooth and polished rock : again the crash is heard, but



CHAPTER IX.

AT the first movement of the stranger, as he raised his hand above the head of the murderer, the fate of Tomaso was so inevitably sealed, that, unable to bear the accumulated horror of the scene, the senses of Melanthe forsook her, and she fell fainting upon the floor. When she recovered, many hours must have passed ; for the glorious sunlight streamed through the grating, and the glad song of the birds resounded from the woods. She, herself, was lying upon her pallet, and Teresina was busy preparing some article of food near the fire. It was so like the day before, that Melanthe at first felt convinced that the hideous scene which rose before her eyes must have passed in a dream. Soon, however, it all came back to her mind—so horrible in its distinctness, that a relapse into insensibility would have been hailed

by her as a relief. She could not speak—she dared not move, for it seemed as if a step might bring her to the brink of that fearful precipice.

Teresina, whose own mind was too gloomy and fierce to allow of her bestowing much sympathy upon her companion, merely recounted, in a few words, how she had found her stretched upon the ground, and had lifted her to her bed ; then, without further inquiry or remark, she placed upon a table the food she had been preparing, and quitted the cave. Long, long did Melanthe watch that day, listening, with a beating heart, to every sound ; for she thought that the murder must be discovered, and she trembled, as though her having witnessed

whose death she had witnessed, were the oldest of the gang; and had ever been supposed to be closely united. Of their friendship, she had seen the strength; of the rest, she could only form a conjecture; but that conjecture was full of terror. However, for the moment, her fears were not realized. The day passed on, and she sat unmolested in her prison; and when evening brought the return of Teresina, the altered countenance of the old woman did not speak of bloodshed or murder.

"Lady," she exclaimed, "what will you give me, if I let you breathe the fresh air of the mountain for half an hour?"

"This," replied Melanthe, taking from her purse a piece of gold.

"Well then," said Teresina, as she eagerly grasped it, "come with me—but you must promise not to stir from my side."

"I will promise it," replied Melanthe.

"Remember, I have not ill-used you, nor taken your jewels, which the Holy Madonna knows I might easily have done; but Teresina is honourable—ay, honourable as any noble lady in Italy;" and she drew herself up with an air of stateliness,

much at variance with her rags and her dirt. Melanthe said nothing, for she saw that the woman had been drinking.

“The Captain said my head was to answer for your’s; and so remember, if you hear his whistle up the hill side, you must come in here directly;” said Teresina. Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on:—“This is the feast of Saint Antonio of Padua, the blessed Saint Antonio! we must keep it merrily.”

“Where are we going?” asked Melanthe, whose heart beat with joy at the prospect even of a momentary release.

“I am going to the feast of Saint Antonio.”

the spot that had witnessed the dark deed of the night. Teresina marked it not ; and turning the angle of the rock, they passed the shade of some large trees, and Melanthe found herself in the midst of a scene totally unexpected. A bright fire blazed in the centre of an open space in the wood, and around it sat, or rather lounged, all those of the gang who had been ordered to remain to keep guard over the prisoner in the cave. They were watching the process by which, in honour of the blessed Saint Antonio, a young wild boar was to be roasted whole ; and while waiting for their repast, regaled themselves plentifully with the wine they had taken from the peasant, who, with the small horse, whose panniers were now nearly empty, stood at a little distance, beneath the shade of a tree.

Melanthe, as she heard the boisterous mirth of the party, stepped back still further into the concealment of the wood, and her presence was unnoticed by the brigands. If, before, she had indulged in a momentary hope of escape, it vanished as she beheld the determination with which Teresina kept close by her side. Not an instant did she with-

draw her vigilance from her charge ; and had it not been for the kindness of the poor plundered peasant, who, when the feast began, seemed to act as cup-bearer to the party, Teresina would have had little reason to rejoice in the festivities held in honour of the blessed St. Antonio di Padua ! So occupied were the brigands with their feast, that the movements of their attendant were unobserved by them ; and cutting a savoury piece of the well-roasted pork, he brought it to the spot where Teresina sat on the grass by the side of Melanthe, placing at the same time a cup and flask of the wine upon the ground. The food was unheeded, but the wine cup in an instant was at the lips of the

until, oppressed by a drowsiness unusual to her, she lay back upon the bank ; still, however, keeping a fold of the dress of Melanthe grasped in her hand.

At length, it was evident that the senses of the woman were gone—was it hope or fear that shot through the breast of the captive as she made the discovery ? Melanthe knew not ; but one instant and her uncertainty was converted into joy so overwhelming, that she pressed her hand upon her lips to stifle the cry which must otherwise have broke forth. The eyes of Teresina were no sooner closed, than, with the speed of light, the peasant from whom the wine had been taken sprung to the side of Melanthe, and raising the hat which covered his features, displayed to her view the countenance of Gennaro !

No time was there for greeting, or surprise. Disengaging the dress of Melanthe from the grasp of Teresina, they stole softly to the spot where the horse was tied. Gennaro cast one look upon the scene, before he lifted Melanthe to the saddle. The wine, which he had drugged, had done its work, and round the still blazing fire lay the stupified revellers. One glance was enough ; and away they

hurried over rock and valley until they reached a spot where another horse stood ready ; and taking an opposite direction from the side by which Melanthe had gained the mountain, they soon left behind them the haunts of the brigands ; and, though not without difficulty, ere the morning dawned, were on the road to Florence.

CHAPTER X.

THE prison of the Inquisition was situated almost in the centre of the city of Rome. Surrounded by walls of an immense height and thickness, not even the tops of the few chimneys could be seen from without ; and had any adventurer, hardy enough to risk the attempt, gained the summit of the walls, his temerity would have been ill rewarded by the discovery that all within was alike mysterious and unapproachable. As though to veil from the face of Heaven the horrors enacted within that den of iniquity, the whole of the buildings were covered with one flat roof, extending nearly to the outward walls. Many windows were in this roof, which admitted the light to the actual covering of the apartments below, all of which were so constructed, that a constant watch could be kept upon those who

occupied the cells, without the unhappy prisoners being aware of the fact.

The building underneath the upper roof was divided into two parts, or long rows of cells, the space left between being paved with stone, forming a sort of covered street, in the midst of which were wells which supplied the water for the use of the prison.

When any prisoner was admitted, he was compelled to walk blindfold for a considerable time between two of the officials, who led him backwards and forwards, and round and round the building, until it was impossible for him to recognise the side by which he had entered. After this, he was consigned to his appointed dungeon. Many of these were totally dark, and not unfrequently the new occupant of the cell stumbled, on entering, over the bones of his predecessor! This, however, had latterly been avoided; and a gleam of light and hope administered to the unhappy victims, less from humanity than to arrest the ebb of reason; for the double terror of solitude and darkness so often produced insanity, that the cruelty of the

tormentors had been thereby in some degree disappointed.

It might have been a fortnight after Melanthe had quitted the city of Rome, that two persons sat together in this prison. They occupied a small apartment, the walls and ceiling of which were covered with crimson cloth, all the other arrangements of the room speaking equally of luxury and comfort. The elder of the two, by his sleek and comely aspect, showed that the monkish habit which he wore had not entailed sufficient acts of penance or mortification to have at all impaired the redundancy of health with which nature had blessed him ; still less would the jovial expression of his countenance, and tranquillity of his broad brow, displayed more fully by his closely shaven crown, have led the casual beholder to suppose, as he looked upon him, that he stood in the presence of one of the most rigorous officers of the Inquisition. Yet such was the state and calling of the individual, who, in his well-cushioned and carpeted room, endeavoured by sundry anecdotes connected with his profession, to beguile the time until

admittance to the secret chamber could be granted to him and to his companion the Cardinal Borgia.

It was indeed Roderigo Borgia who sat by the blazing hearth; but not now did his handsome features glow with the gay and courtly air which had been their wont. Sullen and fierce was the brow upon which the dancing flame of the wood fire played; and although seated in the most luxurious arm-chair, with his feet resting upon a cushion, it was with an air of irrepressible impatience that he turned to his companion, as he exclaimed,

“Is it possible, Diego, that the chamber is not

of life beyond belief. However, as both his eyes were out, I should not think his brain can stand the fire long. I will just look in, and say that your Eminence is in a hurry.

“Do, good Diego! and in the mean time let me have some wine. The room is warm, and I have ridden fast.”

Diego immediately opened a cupboard, and producing a flask and cups, placed them on a small table by the side of the Cardinal, who, filling one of them, drank off its contents at a draught.

“Good wine, by Saint Peter,” he exclaimed, as he refilled the goblet; “and a comfortable chamber for the Palace of torture, methinks;” he added, glancing with a smile round the apartment, which was known in the prison by the name of “*the Red Room*,” being the only one, the walls of which were not hung with black.

“Your Eminence is merry,” replied the Inquisitor; “but we want some little comfort, for the service is hard.”

“Hard!” echoed the Cardinal, while a smile again passed over his face, as he looked upon his rosy and well-fed companion.

"But, my good Diego, you said you would look into the next room—do bid them leave the Turk, and go on with the next prisoner." These words were uttered in a gentle tone, for the services of the Inquisitors were of too much importance to the Holy See, to risk offending any member of the secret tribunal.

"Certainly, if it so please your Eminence," replied Diego with readiness, moving towards the door as he spoke. Just then, a shriek so terrible and prolonged broke upon the ear, that the Cardinal started, and turned uneasily in his chair; but Diego merely retreated from the door which was still unopened, and laying his hand upon the crimson-covered wall, observed, in an apologetic tone, "The stuffing must have given way somewhere;" and he pressed his fingers repeatedly against the side of the room, which Borgia perceived, in order to deaden any sound from without, was entirely lined with cushions.

"It's of no use going in just yet," said Diego, coming close to the lamp which stood upon the table, and taking from his pocket a long piece of paper.

“ Ah ! I see—‘ Julia Wersenstein, a German heretic, follower of John Huss, aged sixteen ;’ they have only just begun with her, for the prisoners never scream so loud after the first few minutes. She wont last long ; I saw her this morning, and by mistake she had been put in the dead cell, and had had no food for a week ! Hassan stands next on the list, so I must pray your Eminence will have patience, and take another cup of wine ;” and Diego quietly restored to his pocket the paper, upon which was inscribed the names of the unhappy victims, with their supposed offences, and the order in which they were to suffer.

“ So you really think he knows nothing about the girl, or the manner of her escape ?” inquired Borgia, as, filling a cup of wine, he presented it to the Inquisitor, at the same time settling himself for a comfortable conversation before the fire.

“ To the best of my judgment, he is quite ignorant of every thing,” replied Diego, with an air of sagacity, at the same time crossing his short fat legs, and sipping his wine.

“ You have only told him that she was missed

just before his return to Rome," inquired the Cardinal.

"That is all," answered Diego; "your Eminence so commanded."

"Requested, my good Diego!" replied Borgia in his most courteous manner. "The officers of the Inquisition are supreme in their jurisdiction. But should he really be ignorant of the place of her concealment, would it not be better to set him at liberty? He can be watched night and day, and it is probable she will at least try to communicate with him."

"A most wise suggestion," observed Diego obsequiously.

"Still Hassan has declared himself a merchant from Smyrna—an Eastern—and no doubt an Infidel; and the great mind of your Eminence cannot follow the turnings and windings of these Greek and Moslem dogs—they would outface his Holiness the Pope—ay, even the blessed Saints of Heaven, did it suit their purpose. No, there is nothing for them but the rack, and even that sometimes fails."

"This Hassan," said Borgia thoughtfully, "is a man of great note in the city—his death might be inquired into; whereas, if he really has nothing to communicate, his detention and examination can be easily explained away as matters of state policy, for this girl is described as a heretic and runaway nun."

"In this case," observed Diego, who saw that some uneasiness, mingled with the hatred of the Cardinal against Hassan, "what might your Eminence think of a middle course?"

"How mean you?" asked Borgia.

"Sometimes I have known fear operate as powerfully as pain. Suppose that another prisoner be put to the torture in his presence, might not the threat of a similar fate extort the secret from Hassan?"

"Well imagined," replied the Cardinal; "but is there any prisoner already condemned?—Time presses."

"Oh!" replied Diego, "we can manage such a trifle as that, if it should be required for the service of your Eminence;" and he pulled out the paper a

second time from his pocket, and ran his eye hastily over it. "I fear we have nothing very good,—
'Two boys, thirteen and fourteen; one woman sickly, and deformed; three old men, all near eighty.' These are of no use; they would not last half-an-hour. Ah! here is the very thing. 'Nathan Myers, Jew, suspected of concealing immense hordes of gold, and accused of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, aged forty-five:'—this will do. I remember him well, though it is some weeks now since he was brought in—a fine handsome man. He will be a grand subject;" and the Inquisitor raised his eyes delightedly from the list, and fixed

fortable chair, and drew the skirts of his robe somewhat more over his knees, to protect them from the heat of the fire.

The horrible indifference with which the Inquisitor spoke of torture and of death in no wise affected Borgia. His stern and powerful mind, accustomed to look only upon the one point, the accomplishment of the object he had in view, disdained to turn aside. Human life was to him a consideration far too trivial in its nature to arrest him in his course; and although the Papal chair, the object of his ultimate ambition, stood ever before his eyes as an incentive to caution, if not to mercy, it was seldom that any pause in his headlong career was the result of forbearance. Already stained by crimes of the deepest dye, the terror of his name was to him a safeguard: but, in the case of Hassan, his usual determination had, in some degree, deserted him; and having caused him to be seized and incarcerated within the walls of the Inquisition, with the intention of extracting, by torture, the secret of the escape of Melanthe, it was with no small degree of satisfaction that he listened to the suggestion of the Inquisitor as to a milder

form of treatment. It was not altogether the sensation which the death of Hassan might occasion, which caused the resolute Borgia to waver. Baffled by the artifices of Vanozia, he had hitherto been unable to trace the steps of Melanthe; and so irritated was his passion, that he did not dare to sever with his own hand the only tie by which he might yet recover possession of all that he had lost.

It was contrary to the laws of the fiendish tribunal to which he had appealed, to allow any eye, save that of the initiated, to look upon the agony of their victims; but a power like that of Borgia, could make as well as unmake laws; and even

her as a heretic ; thus enlisting bigotry where avarice might have failed. For some time, even this measure had proved unsuccessful ; and rendered frantic by the delay, he had caused the unhappy Hassan to be seized the very day, when, within a short distance of Rome, he was returning from his wanderings in search of Elphenor.

CHAPTER XI.

THE return of Diego put an end to the reverie into which the Cardinal had unconsciously fallen; and, rising from his chair, he prepared to follow his conductor to the chamber, where the prisoners always underwent a mock examination, even when their persecutors had previously decided upon their fate! The first care of the Inquisitor was to render

as possible beneath the folds of their dress, lest any peculiar movement might betray to the prisoner a knowledge of his accuser. It seemed to the Cardinal that in a place from whence so few ever returned to tell the tale of what they had seen, a precaution so strict was scarcely necessary: but the rules of the order prescribed every care in its members; and in this instance Borgia did not regret a regulation, which might prevent his encountering the calm, yet searching glance of Hassan.

Fully equipped as an Inquisitor, the Cardinal followed Diego to the secret chamber. For a moment, the change from the well-lighted apartment he had just quitted prevented his seeing clearly; but as his eye grew accustomed to the shadow, he glanced round to take a survey of the room. It was of a circular form, the ceiling and walls being hung with black cloth. At some height from the floor was suspended a large iron lamp, which threw its rays strongly upon the panels into which the surface of the walls was divided, and which represented either skeletons of the most appalling dimensions, or the figures of

men undergoing different stages of the torture, and which were portrayed with frightful distinctness by the same painting of white upon the black ground. That one lamp, glaring upon images so horrible, was the only light in the room, except that which was emitted from a small square lantern, darkened on three sides, the fourth was kept constantly turned upon the face of the prisoner under examination, whoever he might be; and as the Cardinal entered, he almost started on beholding the long snowy hair and beard of Hassan. For an instant one softer thought crossed the mind of Borgia, as the image of Melanthe rose before him; but the first words spoken by the official who occupied the chief place at the table, awoke the dormant rage within the breast of the Cardinal.

“ You are here,” said the Inquisitor, addressing the prisoner, “ to answer for the escape of a heretic from the hands of justice. Will you, of your own free will, disclose the secret of her abode, or must the torture extract it from your lips ?”

The low deep tone in which these words were slowly uttered died away in silence, for the prisoner made no reply, but with a calm, scrutinizing glance

turned his eye from one to another of the shrouded figures before him, covered from head to foot, as though they dared not meet the light that might have told that yet they bore a human semblance.

“ Speak !” said the Inquisitor, “ or the rack awaits you.”

“ Fools !” exclaimed the prisoner, as, with an undaunted air, he raised himself to his full height, and looked haughtily around, “ Idiots that ye are—ye who pretend to know the secrets of the heart. My child! my only treasure, is lost ; and ye speak to me of torture ! My beauteous one is stolen from her home, accused—tracked by blood-hounds like yourselves, and you threaten me with the rack, and with the flame. You have said that she is lost ! Here ! take my limbs ! tear them asunder ! work your bloody will—the torture of Hassan is past.”

“ Prisoner,” said the Inquisitor sternly, “ your violence will avail you nothing. Answer, know you the abode of Melanthe ?”

Hassan remained silent ; but the watchful eye of Borgia perceived, as the beloved name of his

adopted child sounded in that awful chamber, the breast of the old man heave, and his fixed gaze grow glassy from the unshed tear forced back by his proud enduring heart. And the Cardinal, well versed in human nature, saw that the ignorance of Hassan was not feigned. Still it was possible ; and he resolved to omit nothing which might elicit the truth. Touching the arm of Diego, Borgia whispered something in his ear, which apparently was repeated by the Inquisitor to him whose duty it was to examine the prisoner, for the same voice again addressed Hassan :—

“ The young Greek who lives with you is also missing from your house ”

the long-pent-up anguish had melted at the touch of joy, for his heart told him that, guarded by Gennaro, Melanthe was comparatively safe.

His emotion was unnoticed by his fiendish judges, and in a few moments his attention was again called to the present by the voice of the Inquisitor, who said to him, as another prisoner was led into the room,—“If you have concealed aught, your doom shall be as that of yonder blaspheming Jew; yet the sacred tribunal of the Inquisitor is merciful—time will be given you to consider. Look on; but, on peril of your life, speak not.”

The new victim offered a strong contrast in appearance to him who had so narrowly escaped. The Jew, whose riches were the real object of the Inquisitors, was a man in the prime of life, and of striking beauty of person. Tall, strong, and undaunted, he eyed his persecutors with an air of ineffable disdain; and apparently his fine and powerful appearance raised some slight degree of uneasiness in the breasts of his judges, for one of them, on a sign from the superior disappeared, and returned with a reinforcement of two officials,

making their number amount to six, without including the Cardinal or Hassan. The first act of the new comers was to bind the arms of the latter closely behind him, thereby preventing any chance of succour to the unhappy prisoner, even should Hassan have been inclined to offer it. A short examination then followed, in which the Jew stoutly denied the sin of blasphemy, and as resolutely refused to render up to the secret tribunal the riches of which he was possessed, and which it was known he had placed in security.

The sentence of death by torture was then pronounced upon him, the judge pausing in the midst to point out the leniency of the sentence, and

light streamed into the room, disclosing the mysteries of the one adjoining. Four men, whose masks and close-fitting garments of red marked them as executioners, stood by the wheel, which, with all its horrible apparatus, was distinctly seen. The men, who held in their hands thongs of leather, while their sleeves were tucked up above the elbow, as if in token of their trade, advanced to the sliding door of the room, where the Inquisitors still stood in dread array. A long and deep silence was broken by the same harsh tones that had been heard before.

“ Confess !” said the Inquisitor, as he marked the eye of the prisoner wandering over the horrible instruments displayed to his gaze.

“ Never !” replied the Jew firmly.

“ Confess !” repeated the Inquisitor, after a few moments of silence.

“ Never !” again exclaimed the Jew. “ Never shall my tongue condemn to beggary my children, and my wife ! It is my gold you want. Ha ! ha ! ha ! Devils ! do your worst. Nathan, the blaspheming Jew, despises, and spits upon you !”

The signal was given ere the words had passed

his lips, and the frenzied laugh of defiance almost mingled with the shriek which the first moments of agony forced from the victim. Firmly bound to the chair, his arms and legs were fixed and compressed so as to force the blood to the extremities; and long needles placed under the nails were driven in with hammers until concealed in the flesh. This was continued until the prisoner fainted; upon his recovery, the same questions were put to him, but without success.

Finding their efforts ineffectual, the Inquisitors desisted from their examination, and the second torture was ordered. The prisoner being placed in

whole weight rested on his hands, and he reached, unhurt, the giddy height of the pulley. But this could not baffle the murderous skill of his tormentors. With a sudden jerk, they slackened the ropes, and checking them as the form of the prisoner was within a few feet of the ground, the shoulders turned in their sockets, rising above the head, and the wretched man dangled to and fro, suspended by his now powerless hands! In this position, he was again urged to confess, and upon his refusal, the executioners continued to pull the rope alternately, and with such violence, that the head and body of the prisoner struck the stone walls, which soon were smeared with blood. The groans that broke from the poor victim showed how terrible was the anguish he endured; at length making a sign to the executioners to pause, the ropes were lowered, and the Chief Inquisitor approached. The crushed and mutilated form of the unhappy Jew awoke no pity in the breasts of these monsters of bigotry, and it seemed almost a mockery as the official placed his hand upon the pulse, as the dislocated arms lay extended far above the head of the prisoner, who had sunk upon the ground. That

life still remained, was evident, from the exhortation with which the hypocrite strove to convince the Jew of the enormity of his offence, and persuade him to buy his peace from Heaven by the sacrifice of his treasures to the Holy Church.

“Never ! never !” faintly whispered the prisoner, whose voice was stifled by his groans, while the blood which streamed from his ears and mouth rendered the spectacle still more appalling. One by one the Inquisitors now approached, each endeavouring, by the most bitter taunts, to extort the secret for which they panted. But all was useless. The prisoner could not, or would not speak ; and uttering vehement curses upon his obstinacy, the

it had been provided ; and the executioners advancing to the edge, just prevented the drowning wretch from sinking beneath the surface, while the Inquisitor continued to urge him to confession. Perhaps it was the extreme pain of his broken and disjointed limbs—perhaps it was the desire of a death more speedy than he had dared to expect ; but after the first struggles which the suddenness of the transition as well as fear had provoked, the violence of the prisoner subsided, and he lay a helpless weight in the hands of his tormentors.

Their purpose thus partially defeated, the executioners received an order to desist. The Jew was withdrawn from the water, and the yawning chasm in the floor was closed. The hands of the prisoner being unbound, his arms were straightened by his side, and he was laid upon the ground, where, after a cordial had been administered to him, he was suffered to remain for some time, in order to recover sufficient strength for that which he had yet to undergo. His eyes were closed, and he breathed with difficulty ; but the mute agony of his wan countenance, and his mangled limbs, from which the blood continued to flow, made no change in the

intentions of the incarnate fiends who surrounded him.

A door in the side of the room was opened, and a shriek broke from the lips of Hassan, as he beheld the preparations for the fire question. A monstrous grate, filled with the glowing embers of charcoal, stood by the side of an inclined plane, or couch, of small iron bars, across which a sort of cradle to confine each limb was placed. This was what was called the Live Torture, the hollow beneath the bars being filled with live coals; but on the other side of the room the means of a slower process were visible, in the form of a raised bed of brick work, beneath which glowed the light of several small furnaces, any one of which might be extinguished at pleasure, thus inflicting only a partial torture, as the occasion required.

It was not to either of these that the present victim was destined; and Hassan, as he marked the movements of the executioners, beheld a third mode, which, if more slow, might be productive of still greater agony. From beneath the high grate which contained the charcoal, and which was about three feet from the ground, a huge iron tray upon wheels

was slowly rolled forth ; and the chains which hung from either side of it showed the destination to which the executioners were about to consign the dying man.

Hassan looked at the dropping coals and the fearful glare which must almost instantly roast the flesh upon the bones of whoever was placed beneath that grate, and his sense of helplessness gave way before the accumulated terrors of the scene. Springing forwards with a scream, which startled the bystanders by its horror, he threw himself suddenly between the fire and the two men who were about to place their victim beneath it, imploring at the same time, that a speedier death might in mercy be dealt to the prisoner. The frantic energy of the old man suspended for a moment the movements of the executioners, and the words he had uttered reached the ear of the already expiring victim. With an effort of strength, almost superhuman, he freed himself from the grasp of those who held him, raised himself upon his feet, and rushing forward with the wild fury of despair, dashed his head against the stone wall, and fell dead upon the spot !

A long silence followed this act of desperation, till one of the executioners, trembling perhaps lest some blame might be imputed to him for his neglect, observed, in a low tone, "He could not have lasted five minutes,—he had been too long in the swing."

"It is thy accursed interference that has thus robbed the church of her rights. The sacred tribunal shall award thee thy deserts." These words were addressed in a menacing tone to Hassan by the Chief Inquisitor; but before any one could reply, a hurried knocking was heard at the door of the outer room. Immediately the entrance to the fire chamber was closed upon the dead body of the Jew and the executioners, the Inquisitors retiring with Hassan and the Cardinal into the outer room. The door was opened by Diego, and having received a sealed packet from the officer without, a whisper passed between two of the Inquisitors, who beckoned the chief to follow them.

"The fugitive is discovered—taken in her flight across the mountains," were the first words uttered by Borgia; and in a tone of triumph, which showed how deep was the interest of the news to him,

“ His Holiness,” he continued, “ makes it a personal request that the prisoner Hassan, having taken the usual oaths of secrecy, may be restored to freedom, and offers a purse of gold to such as have been instrumental to his capture.”

The Inquisitors bowed low at this announcement, for they were well aware that the Pope, as well as the Cardinal, would pay largely for their services. The mention of the Pope's name was but a feint on the side of Borgia, for the letter he held in his hand was in fact an offer of treaty from the Brigand chief, into whose power Melanthe had fallen. A few words of courtesy and explanation followed; and the Cardinal prepared to throw off his disguise, and to quit the prison, whose terrors could no longer further his designs.

“ Your Eminence will surely drink another cup of that good wine, and supper must be ready by this time,” whispered Diego, as they quitted the secret chamber. The Cardinal assented; and, without appearing to give a thought to any thing he had witnessed, calmly turned with his companion from the horrors of the torture to the luxurious comforts of “ the Red Room.”

CHAPTER XII.

FROM the hour when, at the instigation of Luca Pitti, the Pope had selected a field for the services of Montesecco, at a distance from Rome, the same power had been constantly exerted to prevent the return of the Condottiere to the city. The insubordination of the many small dependencies and

upon bread was magnified into an attack upon the rights of the people. They rose in a mass, demolishing in their fury the stores of grain, and threatening destruction to the city. By a forced march, ere the second day had closed, the forces of the Pope, under the command of Montesecco, appeared before their walls; but the redoubted name of the Condottiere could not calm the spirit of rebellion which had arisen. The insurgents closed their gates against the troops of the Pope, and the affrighted magistrates, with some of the principal citizens, took refuge in the citadel, where they were upon the point of perishing from thirst, when the gallant Condottiere, after a close siege of many days, forced his way into the city, and delivered them from their perilous situation. The rebels laid down their arms, but not before they had lost one half of their forces, while the besiegers found their numbers scarcely diminished.

This was a point in the art of warfare of peculiar importance to the Condottieri of that period, whose consequence mainly depended upon the numbers they could bring into the field, and one in which the genius of Montesecco shone pre-eminent. The

victory he had achieved was one of no small triumph; and it was with a heart beating with joy and pride that the young Condottiere dispatched a messenger with the news to Rome, adding, at the same time, a prayer that leave of absence might be granted, in order that he might, in person, lay the details of the campaign at the feet of his Holiness. The messenger departed, and, with an anxious heart, Montesecco awaited his return.

Latterly fortune appeared to have smiled upon him. A few days before the fall of Perugia, a letter from Luca Pitti had been conveyed to the Condottiere, retracting his opposition to the attach-

returned to give account of his mission. Faithful and secure in his own constancy and affection, he had steeled his heart against the admission of doubt, and awaited with trembling impatience the hour, when, released from his military duties, he might hasten to Rome, and claim the hand which he coveted beyond all earthly treasures. The days which must necessarily intervene before the return of his messenger, were passed by Montesecco in a state of restless anxiety, which, in vain, he endeavoured to control; and, in order to free himself from the irksome duties which a sojourn within the city would have entailed upon him, he caused his tent to be pitched without the walls, and in its retirement abandoned himself to delicious dreams of the future.

It was the tenth day since the officer charged with the dispatches, had set out for Rome, when, as Montesecco sat alone, the curtain, which shaded the entrance to his tent, was drawn aside, and Luca Pitti stood before him. With the delight of a child, the Condottiere sprung towards him; and seizing his hands, poured forth his thanks for the kindness of the letter he had received; with an

energy and rapidity of utterance which proved to Luca Pitti the depth of affection with which the young man regarded Melanthe. Again and again, did Montesecco call down blessings upon him for the consent which he had so generously given, and paint in glowing colours the joy which such an act would also convey to the bosom of Melanthe. But to all this passion of gratitude and happiness, Luca Pitti answered not a word.

“Speak,” cried Montesecco, “I entreat; tell me when I shall see her. What says his Holiness? Will he grant the leave of absence I have asked?”

“My son,” replied Luca Pitti, using the same

Montesecco, for his whole heart was full of Melanthe, and the desire of returning to Rome.

"It is," replied Luca Pitti; "but the place of your destination is not Rome—you are appointed Ambassador of the Pope to the city of Florence."

"How?" said Montesecco, in a tone of surprise, "Ambassador to Florence? The disagreements therefore between the Pope and Lorenzo - - -"

"Are forgotten," interposed Luca Pitti quickly. "Each party has made some concession, and the most friendly relations are established between them; insomuch that the young Cardinal, Raffaele Riario, is appointed Legate, and is even now on his way to Florence in company with Jacopo Salviati, the Archbishop of Pisa."

"The Archbishop, whom the Florentines refused to acknowledge, saying he was an enemy to their state—this is indeed wonderful," exclaimed Montesecco, who was overwhelmed with astonishment at a communication so unexpected.

"Wonderful indeed," replied Luca Pitti; "but the wisdom of the Holy See is manifest, and the friendly visit of these two great dignitaries of the church cannot fail of inspiring the Florentines

with feelings of confidence and affection. Your presence, as the Ambassador of his Holiness, will add much to the weight of so august a meeting."

"But not yet. Surely I may first return to Rome,—for only a day—for an hour," exclaimed Montesecco eagerly, as Luca Pitti shook his head gravely, and said,

"Do not think of it."

"Why not? speak, oh speak to me. Melanthe! oh! why should I not seek her?" said Montesecco, in a troubled voice.

"If you knew all," answered Luca Pitti; and his manner assumed a sternness, which froze the

"Not dead!" he exclaimed almost involuntarily, and then he paused, as if uncertain how to proceed; but the hysterical sob that broke from his listener recalled the startled senses of the designing villain.

"Not dead!" he repeated, "would that she had died before - - -"

"Before what?" cried Montesecco, with a vehemence that made Luca Pitti tremble. He stooped to the ear of his excited listener, and whispered a few words, as though it were even to his black soul the most fitting mode of utterance to a falsehood so heinous. A cry of such agony burst from the lips of the young man, that the cruel Luca Pitti was touched, and he gazed upon the large bright tears now falling rapidly from the eyes that, but a moment before, were radiant with the heart's joy, until a feeling somewhat akin to compunction entered into his breast.

"Be comforted, my son!" he said kindly; but Montesecco did not appear to hear him.

"Dishonoured! false! Melanthe! - - -" he murmured, in tones of the most bitter sorrow. Then, as if all at once his thoughts had taken

another direction, he started to his feet, exclaiming,

“ I ask not, who is the man that hath done this—I would not hear his name until a sacred oath had passed my lips to tear his traitor heart from his breast. Hear me, just Heaven!” he continued, raising his clasped hands, while the frenzy of despair glared from his starting eyes—“ hear me swear that he who hath done a deed so foul shall know no rest, nor peace—by day—by night, by land or sea,—will I track his steps, until my howling curses ring in his ear; no darkness shall hide him from my view,—no sanctuary shield him from my vengeance,—nor will I pause, even at the altar’s

before I left the city. Go thither, ascertain the fact, then meet me at Florence—the secret of her present abode will not be difficult to discover.”

“ Then there is hope,” said Montesecco, gathering comfort from the manner rather than from the words of Luca Pitti.

“ None ! but still I would have you convinced. Do as I have said—I will wait your coming at Florence.”

That evening, with a heart bursting with anguish, Montesecco set out for Rome ; and Luca Pitti, without uneasiness, saw him depart ; for he well knew that his inquiries would only meet with such answers as must confirm the tale invented merely for the base purpose of implanting in the bosom of Montesecco an implacable hatred against Lorenzo.

Of so great importance to the conspirators against the Medici was the co-operation of the Condottiere and his troops, that the crafty Luca Pitti had designed the only mode of enlisting him on their side. Jealousy, and hatred, and disappointed love, were the levers by which he intended to overcome the hitherto immoveable integrity and

honour of the young Condottiere. Thoroughly versed in the workings of the human heart, the one vulnerable point had been adroitly hit by Luca Pitti. The arrow was in the wound, there to rankle and fester, until endurance was exhausted.

To have declared to Montesecco, in the first outbreak of his despair, who was the rival who had thus hurled him from the summit of happiness, might have aroused suspicion; and Luca Pitti cunningly forbore to incur so great a risk. All had been so arranged by this adept in deceit, that the answers which Montesecco must receive in Rome, apparently from uninterested persons, would

the name of Montesecco enrolled in the already formidable list of conspirators ; and, in anticipation of the joyful event, he quitted Perugia a few hours after the departure of his victim, and, with a spirit considerably elated by the progress of his villainous scheme, took his way towards Florence.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER many days of travelling, rendered doubly tedious to Melanthe by the state of weakness to which constant fear and agitation had reduced her, she entered Florence accompanied by Gennaro. Way worn and weary, she could only cast a hurried glance upon the splendour by which she was surrounded ; but still a feeling of satisfaction thrilled through her breast, as she looked back at the beau-

lodging for the night. He certainly gave her two or three directions, but accompanied each with an assurance that he did not think there was a room or a bed in Florence that was not bespoken ; for the Pope's Legate, and the new Archbishop of Pisa, with a host of knights, and nobles, and churchmen in their train, had just arrived, and great feasts and games were to be held in their honour, to witness which all the citizens of Florence had quitted their villas, and come to sojourn in the city.

This was not very encouraging ; but Melanthe, thanking the man for his instructions, turned her horse in the direction recommended, and set out upon her search. For a long time it was fruitless ; her informant had not exaggerated in his statement ; for many of those to whom she addressed herself, assured her that they had given up their own apartments, so great was the number of strangers that had flocked to the city.

At length, however, chance accomplished that in which the best endeavours of Melanthe had failed. An old woman, happening to pass along the street, observed the disappointment visible in the countenance of the stranger, as she had applied, again

unsuccessfully, for admittance, and came up to her, assuring her that if she would be satisfied with humble lodgings, she might be accommodated at her house. Melanthe gladly accepted the proposal; and following Caterina, for so her conductress was named, was soon installed in a comfortable, though homely apartment; while Gennaro, whom Caterina instantly declared to be the brother of the beautiful Signora, was led to an adjoining room. Melanthe was not sorry when she observed the persuasion of the old woman as to the relationship of Gennaro; and although the evasion made the blood rush to her cheek, she felt that to insist upon revealing to a stranger the truth of the circumstances in which she was placed, would be an act of folly. Still, any concealment was painful to her frank and upright nature; and she continued to brood over it with feelings of regret and uneasiness.

Meanwhile, the unconscious object of her annoyance sat alone in his chamber, a prey to the most sorrowful emotions. The excitement of the last few weeks had been too great to permit his giving much thought to the future. The agony he had

endured upon the disappearance of Melanthe,—his ceaseless watching, first to ascertain her abode, and then to effect her escape, had strained his mind to a pitch which had prevented him from indulging in selfish considerations. No sooner, however, was the danger past than a re-action took place, and his grief returned. Once in Florence, he could no longer be to Melanthe that which he had been; while on their harassing journey, she had looked solely to him for support. She had already found a friend—she would find others, and poor Gennaro would be forgotten! Scarcely an hour had elapsed since they had entered the city, and yet, in the solitude of his chamber, Gennaro silently wept. He felt that he was separated from Melanthe; and the thought was so full of misery, that his young heart bowed beneath it. His love was so humble and true, that, from the hour in which he had become aware that any expression of it would be displeasing to its object, he had struggled to conceal the feeling which was fast wearing his life away. The fear of giving pain to her he loved, overcame the natural anxiety of an affectionate heart to paint the anguish it endured; and during the journey no brother's

love could have been more free from passion than that with which the poor dumb boy had watched over his charge.

Deeply touched by his gentleness and forbearance, Melanthe wept over the fatal affection she had so unconsciously inspired ; but prudently forbore, when in the presence of Gennaro, to show, by any increased coldness of manner, that she even suspected his secret. Thus somewhat of their former confidence had been restored ; and during the journey, the hours had passed to him in a delirium of joy. Happy to see her, to ride by her side, and tender her such little services as their position demanded, he thought not what was to be his future fate ;—could the present have endured, he would have asked no more. But once within the streets of Florence, his heart misgave him ; and the idea of Montesecco, of his own jealous fears, and of the preference of Melanthe for the stranger all rushed upon him. He remembered how often he had attempted in his mute way an inquiry respecting the Condottiere, and how constantly Melanthe had avoided the subject, which he felt sure was not from having misunderstood his mean-

ing, for from childhood they had had a language of their own, and their conversation was carried on by signs as rapidly almost as though they had spoken.

All this now came back to the mind of Gennaro, and the feeling of jealousy and anguish was so great, that he almost resolved, now that Melanthe was in safety, to return to Rome, and await the arrival of Hassan, in order to inform him of their late danger and escape. The impetuous nature of the young Greek had nearly urged him to resolve upon this step, when the entrance of Caterina, the woman to whom the house belonged, roused his attention. She made him a sign to descend, and soon the kind and gentle smile of Melanthe, as she beckoned him to sit by her side at supper, put to flight all other feelings, and he determined to remain at Florence.

A few days of repose were absolutely necessary, to restore to Melanthe her accustomed strength, and also to allow her to provide herself with such articles of dress as might enable her to appear in public; for as yet she wore the peasant's garb, in which she had escaped from Rome. Still the seclusion which she was forced to observe, did not

prevent her making constant inquiries of the person to whom she had been directed by Vanozia. No information had been received from Rome, and the fate of her father and of Hassan was therefore still uncertain.

This continued suspense soon became intolerable to her ; and Melanthe resolved that if another day passed without bringing the desired intelligence, she would overcome her scruples, and claim the support and protection which had been so generously offered to her by Lorenzo. While at a distance from Florence, she had easily determined to throw herself upon his friendship ; but now that the hour was come, she shrunk from the thought of appearing as a suppliant before the man whose affection she had rejected. The moment also of her arrival was singularly unpropitious for any private communication with Lorenzo :—surrounded by his illustrious guests, how could he withdraw himself from their society, and the duties of his station, in order to devote himself to the furtherance of her interests ? Perhaps he might have forgotten her—forgotten the promise he had made ; and the heart of Melanthe sunk as she

thought of her poor father, helpless in his dungeon, and watching, day after day, for the return of his child.

Many weeks had now elapsed since she had quitted Rome, many more might elapse ere a word of comfort would reach him, and in the mean time could she hesitate? As this idea arose, the timidity of Melanthe gave way, and she resolved to lose no time in endeavouring to see Lorenzo. This, to any person more versed in the usages of the world, especially in those of Florence, would have been a matter of little difficulty; for the ear of Lorenzo was at all times accessible; and many hours were daily set apart by him for the reception of those who claimed his services in their behalf. Ignorant of this, and magnifying to herself the difficulty and publicity of presenting herself to his notice, Melanthe heard with delight that on the following day a masque would be given by Lorenzo at his villa of Fiesole, to which the greater part of the citizens of Florence would be admitted.

The gay meeting was to be held in honour of the young Cardinal, Raffaele Riario, who had arrived with the Archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Salviati,

the dignitaries of the church not deeming it derogatory to their sacred character to be present at similar festivals; and Melanthe preferred entering with the crowd, and endeavouring to seize a favourable opportunity of discovering herself to Lorenzo, to making the demand of a formal interview. The kindness of her hostess soon procured to her the means of carrying her wishes into effect. All strangers, visitors to Florence, were included in the invitation of Lorenzo to the masque; and it was arranged that, under the escort of some relations of Caterina's, Melanthe and Gennaro should the next day proceed to Fiesole. As soon, however, as this arrangement was made known to

CHAPTER XIV.

THE persons who had so kindly invited Melanthe to accompany them to the masque at Fiesole belonged to the middle class of life ; yet, by the wise regulations of Lorenzo, they were not upon that account excluded from a participation in the enjoyments of their superiors in station.

The whole body of the Florentine citizens engaged in commerce was divided into companies, or, as they were then called, *arts*. These comprised the greater and the lesser arts. The former consisted of those belonging to professions, or exercising the higher descriptions of commerce ; the latter were confined to trade and handicrafts. Of both of these classes the officers of the companies, and such individuals as were distinguished by influence and industry, were readily admitted to the assemblies of the nobles and chief citizens, an arrangement which materially contributed to the extreme

popularity enjoyed by Lorenzo de' Medici. The lively and impressionable people were charmed with the gaiety and magnificence of their young ruler ; and the announcement of any new festival, instead of exciting the feeling of discontent so natural to those excluded from such enjoyments as they might reasonably have hoped to share, was always received with enthusiasm by the whole population of Florence.

The villa of the Medici, near the beautiful hill of Fiesole, was the scene of many a courtly pageant. Nothing, which taste could devise or art accomplish, had been omitted to render the spot one of enchantment. The house had been built and fur-

olive, that trembled and whitened in the breeze. And as the eye turned to the plain, the surface of the gentle slope which led to it was broken by stately cedars, interspersed among the groves of forest trees, between which gleamed the soft verdure of the turf, enamelled with a profusion of beds of the choicest flowers, and watered by numerous streams, supplying fountains which filled the air with delicious coolness. From the nature of the ground, this water had been necessarily brought by means of aqueducts from a considerable distance ; but all was so perfectly contrived, that any appearance of formality was avoided, and those who loved to watch the course of the rippling stream, as it murmured through the dark chestnut woods that clothed the rear of the villa, little imagined how much labour and cost had been expended in order to produce so admirable an effect.

Two hours before sunset, Melanthe arrived at the gates of the villa. The scene of enchantment which opened before her was so novel in its kind, that she remained standing for a considerable time upon the mound, which, crowned by a lofty cedar,

was the point of attraction to all such as preferred the part of spectator to that of joining in the gaiety of the throng. The whole of the vast garden, interspersed with woods, which for a considerable distance extended over the plain below, was covered with groupes of masquers. The dazzling effect produced by the variety of colours in their gay dresses lighted up by the glories of an Italian sun, at first prevented Melanthe from distinguishing the characters assumed; and on an invitation from her companions she descended from the eminence where she had placed herself, in order to take a nearer view of the different arrangements of a festival the renown of which eclipsed all that was

of the community, and formed a very insignificant portion of the gay and splendour-loving people who thronged the scene.

As Melanthe moved on, she was struck by the extreme order which seemed self-preserved in so numerous an assemblage. The Florentine people, accustomed to mingle in the brilliant festivals and masques given by the rulers of their rich and magnificent republic, entered at once into the spirit of the scene. Secure of their reception, and confident in the liberality and generous profusion of their entertainers, each citizen seemed to feel an individual responsibility for the success of the pageant in which he was by courtesy an actor. There was no hurry—no pushing, or scrambling for places or precedence—all was gay, harmonious, and courtly ; and so much care had been bestowed, not only upon the costumes and accessories of those who had chosen to adopt either historical or mythological subjects, but also upon the localities most conducive to the good effect of their first appearance, that each group seemed to occupy, as if by magic, the exact spot appropriate to its character.

The classic spirit of the age, as well as the

individual taste of Lorenzo, was traceable throughout, and with a most happy effect, in not only elevating the mind by higher associations, but in preventing the monotony always incidental to gorgeousness when allowed to predominate over the airiness of fancy, or the simplicity of good taste.

In imitation of the ancients, many of the masquers had adopted the garb of different Schools; and among the long-robed and bearded sages who, beneath the wide-spreading oaks overhanging the stream, seemed, as they walked to and fro, to revive the disputations of the Academus, the companions of Melanthe pointed out to her notice some of the most eminent scholars and artists of the day.

Passing this grave assembly, Melanthe gained the end of the wood, when her ear caught the sound of music, and in another moment she found herself in front of a light and graceful temple, standing on a slight eminence above the stream. A beautiful boy, whose hyacinthine curls hung to his shoulders, was singing to a golden lyre; and round the rock, upon which sat this youthful representative of Apollo, were appropriately grouped

nine of the fairest flowers of Florence, each lovely enough to have made the bosom of the gentle Muse she personated heave with envy of mortal charms. Gladly would Melanthe have paused to examine more closely faces so bright and beautiful ; but her companions hurried her forward, and turning to the shade of a grove, the nymphs of Diana, equipped for the chace, were seen following their stately Goddess through a neighbouring glade.

Many other sylvan sports were pictured in this wooded glen, and Fauns and Satyrs played their merry antics, startling the passers by as they peeped beneath the branches of the low-sweeping chestnut-trees ; and the vine-crowned Bacchantes danced around the bower of their God, and, with their attendants, made the woods echo to their jovial strains.

But amidst all this gaiety the heart of Melanthe grew sad, she scarce knew why, and tears started to her eyes as, emerging from the wood, she found herself as it were transported to the country of her birth, though alas ! to her it was known only by tradition. A joyous band of Greek maidens were

dancing the Romaika on the smooth green sward, and the melodious tones of the leader of the measure thrilled through the bosom of the poor exile, who, as she stood in the country of the stranger, thought with a bitter sigh on the ruined glories of her own bright land ! She did not dare to stay, and hastening forwards, the sound of the Grecian song was soon drowned in the clang of the cymbals that ushered in a gorgeous train, and the turbaned brows and jewelled scimitars of the princes of the East, cast into shade a company of lowly pilgrims, pacing meekly by with their shell-adorned robes and sandalled feet.

Melanthe turned from the crowd and passing

But Melanthe passed them with a sigh, nor paused to listen to the Minstrel's song, as the lays of Provence sounded on her ear ; but hurried on, as though the gentle tones of love and joy were pain to hear. Many were the characters recalling the heroes of other days, from the laurel-crowned consul following the white robe of his lictors through the mazes of the crowd, to the splendour of the Emperors. Amongst these, the Count Girolamo Riario, who personated Augustus, moved forwards with a mockery of state, which he would fain have converted into reality. Every country, and every age, seemed to have rendered up its mighty dead in all the pomp and braveries they had worn in life, and, to the eye of Melanthe, who was deeply versed in the annals of the past, they arose as so many old familiar faces.

But theirs were not the features that she sought amongst the crowd ; though the sickliness of fancy ever seemed to present them to her view, showing a form that still, as she approached, would mock her touch and vanish into air. The conviction that, in an immense assemblage of persons, the single one our heart seeks, must of necessity be present, is

one of those inexplicable impressions by which reason is constantly overpowered. Although Melanthe felt that it was almost impossible that Montesecco could be in Florence, yet from the moment she had first beheld the multitude which overspread the gardens, her eye had involuntarily sought the form of him she loved. As she had last seen him, so did the uncontrollable impulse which forced her on, lead her to expect he would now appear, and among the gay and gorgeous dresses of the crowd, she looked only for the light armour of Milan steel inlaid with gold, and the long black plume that was wont to shadow the proud and beautiful brow of the young Condottiero.

the house where she hoped to have an opportunity of seeing Lorenzo, when a sudden light, which illuminated the whole garden, induced her to pause, and curiosity soon took the place of her former languor. Then arose a scene of such unequalled beauty, that at first the multitude, assembled to behold it, was dumb from amazement.

At the lower part of the garden, the streams which watered it, had been purposely united until they formed a sheet of water extending to a considerable distance, and presenting the appearance of a broad river flowing at the foot of the hill. It was upon this water that was now represented one of those pageants which were, at that time, the rage in Italy, yet which, from the difficulty of their accomplishment, were generally confined to two or three subjects. But with Lorenzo de' Medici nothing was difficult. Before his master mind, all obstacles gave way, whether in the government of his country or the management of his masque; and, to the delight of the assembled crowd, the spectacle now exhibited, far surpassed any thing of the kind which they had ever before witnessed.

The first of the floating wonders which glided before the eyes, was an exact representation of Neptune and Amphitrite, who, surrounded by their Tritons and the Neriads, reposed on their splendid car, amidst rocks of coral, so artificially arranged, that they seemed to grow out of the water upon which they glided. This was followed by illustrations of Homer, amongst which Ulysses binding himself to the mast of his ship, in order to escape from his Circean tempters, was one of the most striking; the Syrens being personated by some of the most beautiful women of Florence; while unseen musicians supplied the melody, apparently flowing from the golden harps carried by the lovely

been duly made; while between the different parts of the representation a succession of the most brilliant fire-works was displayed.

A pause of some minutes had taken place, when the sound of soft music, breathed as it were from the bosom of the sparkling waters, drew the attention of all to the spot from whence it proceeded. Gradually it swelled upon the ear, till, from the shadow of the far woods emerged a stately vessel, whose masts and oars were of silver, and the sails of purple silk, glittering with thousands of silver stars. A fragrant cloud from the burning incense on her deck, was wafted forward by the gentle breeze, and, as it cleared away, the name of Cleopatra, mingled with that of Bianca de' Medici, burst from a thousand lips. It was indeed the beautiful Bianca, sister of Lorenzo, who appeared before the delighted assembly as the Egyptian Queen. Beneath a canopy of silver gauze, festooned with roses, she was seen reclining upon a couch; her sons, fair children, representing Cupids, kneeling by her side, and fanning her with peacocks' feathers. To continue the illusion, when, as the Paphian Queen rising from the sea, Cleopatra had glided on the wave of the

Cydnus, the management of the fairy vessel of Bianca was entrusted to the hands of boys disguised as mermaids and sea nymphs ; and such was the dexterity with which they acquitted themselves, that the gilded bark sailed rapidly by without the slightest difficulty. The enthusiasm of the spectators was unbounded ; and the people, enchanted to see that one of the family who was its idol, thus condescended to take a public part in their amusements, rent the air with shouts and blessings on the name of the Medici.

It was a splendid spectacle. The day had gone down, but the transparency of an Italian night, left all distinctly visible. Above was the dark outline of the distant mountains, between which and the gardens of the villa rose the singular and picturesque hill of Fiesole, crowned with the ruins of its ancient city. Lower down, the dark masses of the woods scattered over the immense extent of pleasure ground, where fairy lakes glittered, and fountains played amidst the flowers ; and temples and statues innumerable peeped out from their leafy screens, upon the restless crowd which was gathered on the banks of the water, and which

looked in the glare streaming from the opposite side as though some of every nation had come, at the bidding of Lorenzo, to do honour to his feast ; and as if even the Gods, unwilling to lose the charms of a scene so fair, had descended from Olympus to share the joys of mortal revels.

And Melanthe gazed around. She saw in all the working of that spirit so congenial to her own. She felt the power of that mind which could devise, and execute, and feel the beauty of such an hour, and such a scene. She heard the voices of thousands upraised in honour of one whose excellence she too acknowledged, and in the outpouring of grateful hearts one name was mingled with blessings and with prayers. One name—and she remembered that name might have been her own—might, if she so willed it, still be hers. One word, and she might stand as Queen upon that spot. She saw it all, felt it all ; and then when, by the excitement of the hour, and the intoxication of public approval, the actual conviction of the wealth, and station, and absolute power of Lorenzo was more vividly forced upon her feelings, did the mind of Melanthe waver ? Did she regret the words, by which she had bade

the lord of all she saw, rise from her feet a hopeless and rejected suitor? Did she think on Montesecco, the nameless and the poor, and did his long absence and apparent neglect rise up before her as crimes, whereby her own want of faith might be fully justified? No! The heart of man may tremble in its devotion, and lay upon a golden shrine its light and hollow vows; but woman's love, once truly given, is changeless in its faith!



CHAPTER XV.

THE banquet, which followed the conclusion of the masque, was in accordance with the splendour of all that had gone before; but as the object of Melanthe was, if possible, to meet with and speak to Lorenzo without the form of a regular announcement, which she feared might provoke more of the public attention than she felt equal to support, she accepted the offer of her companions to view from the gallery the circular hall of the villa, which was always set apart for the reception of the different members of the family of the Medici and the most distinguished of their guests. This arrangement was the effect more of the general and spontaneous courtesy of the Florentines towards their rulers, than from any desire on the part of the latter to exclude others; but when, at the conclusion of

the masque, it was announced that, in compliment to the Archbishop and the Legate of the Pope, Lorenzo would sup in the Hall of the Fountain, the body of the masquers took their way to the vast and commodious temporary apartments where the banquet was prepared for them in the garden, leaving such as were strangers, or whose curiosity prompted them, to take a nearer view of the renowned individuals to whom the villa belonged.

Of this number was Melanthe; and it was not without emotion that she found herself beneath the roof of Lorenzo. The Hall of the Fountain was so named from one of singular beauty by which it was ornamented. It was placed on the opposite side to the principal entrance to the hall. The water was so impelled that it reached almost to the height of the lofty ceiling, sometimes ascending in spiral lines, then turning in wreaths and feathery sprays, playing and sparkling in the light, till it fell, like a fairy cascade, between the fragrant branches of the orange and lemon trees, intermingled with bright flowering shrubs, arranged on either side of the marble basin beneath.

The banquetting hall of this summer palace of

the Medici was circular, and of immense height, and entirely lined with marble of the purest white. Two winding staircases, intersecting each other at intervals, formed as it were distinct galleries, supported on pillars of variously coloured marbles, the lower range being of porphyry, the second of the inestimable green jasper, and the upper row of the pale yellow marble of Sienna. At the base of the fountain was a beautiful sculptured group, representing the despair of Galatea, and the terror of her attendant nymphs; and the effect of the many other noble works of art ranged around the hall was heightened by the deep red of the porphyry, forming a rich base to the structure, the architectural beauty of which was the theme of every tongue. Countless lamps illumined the hall, those immediately above the fountain being variously coloured, which gave to the water playing in their light the appearance of a shower of gems.

The banquet was spread, and the guests began to arrive; and Melanthe, who had, with many others, placed herself on the lower gallery just above the principal table, watched anxiously for

the entrance of Lorenzo. In a few minutes he came, leaning, as he walked, upon the arm of Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, and followed by Raffaele Riario, the Legate of the Holy See, a man who, although scarcely past the age of boyhood, had, within the last few weeks, been raised by the Pope, for his own purposes, to the dignity of a Cardinal.

The table was soon filled; and the beautiful Bianca, having finished her part in the masque, entered the hall with her husband, Guglielmo de' Pazzi, and took the seat appointed for her, which was at a table close behind that occupied by Lorenzo and his guests. Bianca was tenderly beloved by

The supper was far advanced, and gaiety seemed at its height, when a movement was observable at the entrance of the hall, and an attendant announced, in a loud voice, the arrival of the Roman Ambassador. The recent reconciliation of the Pope and the city of Florence, being considered by the people as an event of great importance, added unusual excitement to the arrival of an Ambassador from his Holiness, and every eye was strained towards the door, to catch the first glimpse of him, who, besides the dignity of office, was so distinguished by military renown. In a few moments, the Ambassador entered the hall; in a few more, curiosity had given way to admiration; and the burst of applause, which rose simultaneously on all sides, and the cries of "Long live the Ambassador of the Pope;" "welcome to the brave Condottiere;" somewhat startled Montesecco, who was unprepared for such a reception.

Pausing for an instant, he removed the jewelled cap, whose lofty plumes partially shaded his face; and bending low, in courtesy to the applauding spectators, advanced to meet Lorenzo, who had come forward to receive him. So great was the

beauty of the form and features of Montesecco, that every movement seemed to kindle fresh admiration in the bosom of the crowd, and his name, with that of Lorenzo, was again lauded to the skies.

The superb appearance of the new Ambassador considerably heightened the enthusiasm in his favour; for the eyes of a people so fond of show as were the citizens of Florence, delighted to dwell upon the splendour of his accoutrements, as well as upon the grace and dignity of his deportment. The full dress of the Roman nobles which he wore, was richer than that which was customary at Florence. It consisted of a close-fitting doublet of cloth of gold, the sleeves slashed with purple satin, and looped with jewels, which glittered also on the hilt of his sword, and the belt by which it was suspended. A short cloak of purple velvet, barred with gold, and trimmed with a border of the richest sables, was clasped upon the left shoulder with a star of diamonds, and completed the magnificent dress by which Montesecco had replaced the armour he usually wore. The applause having subsided, the new Ambassador took his place at the table, the Archbishop making room for him between himself

and Lorenzo, and seemingly overwhelming him by his attention ; while the dark brow of Luca Pitti, who had entered with Montesecco, grew radiant with delight as he marked the reception bestowed upon the Ambassador of the Pope.

But, amidst this fever of enthusiasm, what words shall describe the feelings of Melanthe ? Fear and joy alternately predominated over the astonishment with which she had viewed the entry of Montesecco. In vain she addressed to her companions incoherent questions of the past. The light-hearted Italians thought only of the present hour, and all she could learn was, that the quarrel between Rome and Florence had been adjusted ; and that Montesecco, who had for some time commanded the armies of the Pope, had been named as his Ambassador, and had that very day arrived, although he had been expected in Florence for some time past. This information, though somewhat vague, told of many events which must have occurred during the seclusion from the world which the adventures of Melanthe had entailed upon her : but satisfied with the result, since it appeared to have almost miraculously effected her wishes, she forbore to inquire

further, and gave herself up to the delight engendered by the consciousness of once more finding herself in the presence of him she loved. The happiness of gazing upon him prevented her at first from remarking the changed expression of his countenance; but soon she observed with pain that the gentle smile which was wont to play upon his lips came not there; sorrow and bitterness sat upon his brow, and gave a look of care to a face that before was radiant with youth and hope. The sadness of his air filled the heart of Melanthe with still deeper love. Perhaps he was thinking of her, and remembering her own sorrow, and the torture of suspense she had suffered from his long silence, she wept unrestrainedly over the grief to which her gentle heart ascribed the alteration of his appearance. Such tears are, indeed, sweet, when we know that care is ended; and the overburthened heart of Melanthe relieved by them, soon rose from the state of despondency into which her many trials had plunged her. Filled with confidence by the arrival of Montesecco, she now rejoiced that Lorenzo was still ignorant of her being at Florence, and resolved to present herself to his eye only under

the care of her affianced husband. A day of hope was breaking. She thought of her poor father—of the faithful and affectionate Hassan—of Gennaro—and the happy re-union which the love of Montesecco and the power of Lorenzo would effect—and a fervent though silent prayer ascended to Heaven, for her heart was too full of joy !

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT Montesecco saw her not; and if, at that moment, the image of Melanthe crossed his mind, it was only as an incentive to the dark and bitter passions raging in his breast. Completely deceived by the machinations of Luca Pitti, Montesecco had yielded himself up as an instrument in the hands of the conspirators, and from having once been deaf to their entreaties, was now become the most zealous and blood-thirsty of the band. Little did those imagine, who gazed upon the noble form and features of the young ambassador, that beneath the jewels sparkling on his breast, the dagger of the assassin lay concealed; and little did they dream that clustering round the board at which sat their intended victim, calm and unsuspecting, were those whose sacred oath had bound them to do a deed, which would transmit their names branded with infamy to posterity. Dark was the age when such

a scheme was nurtured and contrived,—when the dignitaries of the Church, and the nobles of the land, could league together like a band of lawless ruffians, and enter the peaceful hall of an unsuspecting man, with an oath upon their lips that either he or they should not go forth alive.

Yet so it was. After deep and mature deliberation, the hour of the banquet had been chosen by the conspirators, for the murder of Lorenzo and Giuliano ; and the arrival of Montesecco had been purposely delayed by the artifices of Luca Pitti, who trembled lest the noble nature of the young man should rise superior to the hatred with which, impressed with the belief of the guilt of Melanthe, his heart now burned against Lorenzo. It was a daring resolve, thus, in the very hour of mirth, when the hearts of the gratified crowd warmed afresh towards their generous and courteous host, to slay him in their sight ; but the fickle nature of the people was well known to the conspirators. The only scions of the house of the Medici once cut off, the multitude would rally round the existing power. The authority of the Pope would sanction the deed, and numbers would flock to his banner,

whom fear and weakness had hitherto deterred from declaring their hostility to Lorenzo. The risk might be great, but the result was certain ; and so numerous was the body of conspirators, that delay promised more danger than the attempt.

And Montesecco, the noble and the brave, was the man selected for so vile a deed. In the blood of Lorenzo, the stain on the honour of Melanthe must be washed out ; and Montesecco, as he sat beside his victim, had need of this dreadful thought, or he had failed in his murderous intent. The manner of Lorenzo was so winning, that it was difficult to resist its influence ; added to which, and as it were in spite of his own resolution, the heart of Montesecco was touched.

It is impossible to look upon one, however guilty he may be, whose hours on earth are numbered, without a degree of interest, which is full of a strange fascination. To watch the gradual ebb of life, even when the attenuated form and lustreless eye tell of a long preparation for the coming hour, is sufficiently painful ; but to behold face to face, a fellow creature, full of life, and health, and intellect, and to know that ere a few moments have

passed, the soul that is within will stand before its Creator, and the inanimate clay lie helpless at our feet, is a sensation so terrible, and full of awe, that even when upheld by law, reason quails beneath it, as it questions the right of man to do a deed thus fearful ! But when this deed is voluntary and premeditated,—when hatred, not justice, points the steel, and jealous ambition nerves the arm to do the hangman's work, then, if there be still a human feeling in his heart, must the breast of the murderer, glaring on his victim even as a tiger crouches ere he springs, throb with all the pangs of terror and conscious guilt !

Writhing with these feelings, Montesecco sat by the side of Lorenzo ; still, though the dread shadow of the vengeance of God fell upon him, human passion and human sin did their deadly work, and wrapped him in their folds. His resolution did not waver—one thought was in his mind, one vision before his eyes. Melanthe false—Melanthe degraded—wandering homeless on the earth,—his own Melanthe, before whom he had poured out his soul's worship. Her betrayer was at his side ; and Montesecco, steeling his heart to all emotion, grasped

the dagger concealed in his robe, and kept his eye fixedly upon Luca Pitti.

The appointed signal was to be the rising of Luca Pitti to give the health of Lorenzo. Then would Montesecco plunge the steel into the heart of his unsuspecting host, while Francesco de' Pazzi would stab Giuliano, whose seat was on the opposite side of the hall; and the Archbishop was immediately to declare the Medici tyrants, and proclaim the citizens of Florence free to choose any form of government most pleasing to them. In case of resistance, messengers were in readiness to be dispatched to the troops which had

dent should betray their secret, when a low voice, close to his ear, exclaimed,

“ All is lost,—Giuliano will not come !”

Montesècco slightly turned his head, and the scowling brow of Francesco de' Pazzi was just discernible under the hood of the Pilgrim, which was the disguise he had adopted. The plan had thus unexpectedly failed ; since to murder Lorenzo without his brother would in no way have advanced the designs of the conspirators. All hope for the time was at an end. With a beating heart, Montesecco watched the russet gown of the pretended pilgrim, till he saw it reach the side of Luca Pitti, who immediately rose and quitted the hall ; and then Montesecco, not daring to trust himself another moment by the side of Lorenzo, arose also, and sought the open air.

CHAPTER XVII.

As the gorgeous sunlight mellowed at eve, so, as the festival advanced, had the fever of hilarity and excitement subsided into a calmer spirit and a more gentle joy. The dance and the song went on, and large awnings were spread for those who chose to join in the amusement without remaining in the open air. The most beautiful parts of the garden were brilliantly illuminated, lamps of every

on the border of the broad stream, which was so completely screened by the thick foliage of the trees, that the glare of the lamps did not mingle with the flood of silver light in which the spot was bathed. Montesecco paused as he reached the bank, and looked around. The water rippled by at his feet, again and again softly kissing the bright ray playing on its breast, as though it loved to linger in its embrace. There was peace upon the earth, and breathing through the still air came the sound of the distant music, even as a happy sigh redolent of joy and love. Montesecco lifted his eyes to Heaven, and beholding its calm majesty, and the gleam of the many stars, like the glance of angels' eyes smiling gently down, he turned mournfully from a scene, the peace of which was too strongly contrasted with the tempest now raging in his own breast.

The nature of Montesecco was changed. Irritated to madness by the sorrow of which the supposed delinquency of Melanthe was the cause, he was as if under a spell. Driven onwards by its power, he had bound himself to do a deed his soul abhorred; and although in the age in which he lived, many a less crime than that with which, in

his eyes, Lorenzo stood charged, was daily atoned for with life, yet the honest heart of Montesecco called such a vengeance by its true name of murder ! Dire must have been the hatred, and wild the rage, that could have warped the uprightness of his nature ; but goaded by distress of mind, he had rushed blindly on, as though to end his life and misery with one stroke.

The failure of the conspiracy had worked a fearful change within his breast. By the sudden alteration of the plans of the conspirators, the tension of his feelings had been relaxed, and his ideas thrown into confusion. But in the midst of all, a sensation was uppermost like that of a criminal

appeared displayed before him :—but above it, the words, “Thou shalt do no murder !” in letters of fire, seemed to scorch his brain ; and horror of his intended crime took possession of his soul.

Long and deeply did he ponder upon his state. Snatched, as it were, by the hand of God, from the precipice down which he was about to plunge, should he again rush to its fearful verge ? His head grew giddy with such thoughts ; and throwing himself upon a seat, he endeavoured to chase the gloomy images from his soul. By degrees, he became more calm. The stillness of the hour, the beauty of the scene, lent their aid to dissolve the iron spell that bound him, and his thoughts gradually softened. But, perhaps, this state, if more in accordance with his better nature, was yet more difficult of endurance. It is so impossible, especially to the young, to look calmly forward to life as a blank and dreary void, and what now had Montesecco to cheer him on his path ? His beacon star had set, and for ever ! Melanthe lost, what was to him fortune or fame ? The secret of his birth—a secret which, had the fate of another been entwined with his own, he would have devised some means of forcing Luca

Pitti to reveal, was now valueless. The poetry of life was gone. His nature, fervent and devoted, could know no other love. Melanthe was false, and he was desolate for ever ! And with the name of one so deeply loved, came bitter thoughts—thoughts of past days, when, bright and beautiful, she had shone upon his sight, even as the sun gladdens the face of Nature—when, from her lips, words pure as an infant's thoughts had blessed his ear. Pure, holy, and true, was Melanthe when he had left her. Alas ! what had wrought this fearful change in one so lofty of purpose and firm of soul ? Grief, bitter grief, filled the heart of Montesecco,

"Oh! why do you weep? speak to me," said the voice which now trembled, and had lost its tone.

"Who are you?" asked Montesecco, shuddering as a gentle hand was laid upon his arm.

"Cruel!" replied the stranger, "you do not know me—I should have known you even - - -"

"Heavens!" interrupted Montesecco, "that voice—it cannot be - - -"

"It is—it is—your own Melanthe!" she cried, as, throwing off her hood and mask, she rushed to the arms of Montesecco.

"Melanthe! O God! away! do not touch me," he exclaimed almost with a shriek, as he started from her.

"Away? Montesecco—dearest—what can you mean?" said Melanthe, as she stood with outstretched arms before him.

"Leave me," said Montesecco hoarsely! "we must never meet again:" and he turned as if to depart.

"Not meet again," said Melanthe, springing towards him and endeavouring to take his hand; "oh, this is some jest—though a cruel one. You

know not how I have sought you—watched for you. Montesecco, speak—speak to me!”

“I cannot—base, perjured as you are!”

Melanthe sunk upon her knees before him.

“Go,” resumed Montesecco contemptuously, “go kneel before him, who has made you what you are;—kneel, and weep, and pray, that with his gold and with his power, he may yet make you a name better than that I would have given.”

“How?” said Melanthe, passing her hand over her brow.

“These words - - -”

“Must I speak more clearly?” interrupted

arms round him, "you are unjust—deceived—I am innocent!"

"Ay," said Montesecco bitterly; "perhaps so, in the world's view. You have been tempted—deceived—and you have been false!—false to one, who would have given his heart's blood for you."

"No, no," shrieked the wretched girl, "I have loved but you."

"Loved—perhaps so," said Montesecco, endeavouring to free himself from her grasp. "Yet I ask no more than this," and he raised the mask of Melanthe from the ground.

"Disguised—concealed; why come you thus to his house? Because you *dared not* to meet the public eye. False girl, farewell! May Heaven forgive your crime!" and Montesecco, forcibly disengaging her twining fingers from his cloak, rushed from the spot, and was soon lost to sight.

Melanthe rose from the ground, straining her arms upon her breast. "False!" she repeated in a low hoarse tone, "false—and to him!" As she spoke, the sense of her desolate position overcame her: sinking on her knees, she raised her

come slowly down,
followed; and all th
about like ink spots
swelling, till a sea of
and from the heart
the sobbing night-wi
moan and icy breath
colder—and colder—

CHAPTER XVIII.

“**HARK!** the trumpet sounds; and see, the Legate and the Archbishop are leaving the palace! By heaven, not a word of welcome is vouchsafed to them by the rabble that crowd the square; and yet did one of the accursed Medici appear, hundreds of caps would fly into the air, while it rung with the accustomed clamour. I am weary of this.”

These words were uttered, in a bitter tone, by Francesco de' Pazzi, who, under pretence of visiting his kinsman, Guglielmo, had been for some days resident in Florence; and, from the windows of the palace, watched, with a jealous eye, the movements of the populace lingering in the city, only long enough to see the departure of the gallant train, which was to accompany Lorenzo and his guests to the arena without the walls,

where the combat of wild beasts was that day to take place.

At the exclamation of Francesco, Guglielmo de' Pazzi approached the window. That instant a simultaneous shout burst from all parts of the square. Mounted on a noble steed, a horseman rapidly advanced to meet the Cardinal and the Archbishop; and the cries of "Palle! palle! viva Lorenzo!" grew yet louder, as their young

favourite, taking off his cap, bowed his thanks graciously to the people. In a few moments the square was deserted; but the joyous cries of the mob were still heard, as it followed the steps of the horsemen.

The check of Francesco reddened as he beheld this fresh proof of the public affection with which the object of his hatred was regarded; and Guglielmo, who, although a conspirator, could not forget that, as the husband of Bianca de' Medici, a portion of the popularity of his brother-in-law extended to himself, took occasion to observe,

"Do you think they will shout so for us, Francesco, when their present idol is laid low?"

"Louder still, if we begin by ministering to

their pleasures," replied Francesco; " they are fickle as the wind."

" Yet," observed Guglielmo, doggedly, " my opinion is that our scheme will be marred in the execution. I never can believe that the hour of a festival is propitious to our plans. Why select the time when the people, full of mirth, and excited by wine, will the more fiercely resent an attack upon those who have provided for their amusement?"

" Because the very hour of excitement is that in which a populace is the most easily led. Only give an impetus to their fury, they care little on which side they fight."

" Ah! that is Luca Pitti's doctrine; but I am not so fully persuaded of its truth. After all, the absence of Giuliano from the masque at Fiesole had something ominous in it—it was the first time that I ever remember his absenting himself from a festival; he is as fond of gaiety and show as the rest of the good citizens of Florence. For my part, I think they have all gone mad since Lorenzo has been in power. Do you not think it is rather a pity to disturb their pleasures?"

" How?" said Francesco, sharply, not liking the

half-earnest tone in which these words were uttered by Guglielmo. "Would you retract?"

"No," said Guglielmo, firmly; "whatever I may think, I will not retract. I have sworn to stand or fall with those of my own blood—but Bianca - - -"

"Will forget a brother, when she shares the good fortune of a husband," replied Francesco. "And if she should not," he added, sternly, "are

individual considerations to stand in the way of the interests of a family like our's? Are tyrants to flourish, because a woman weeps? and the noblest in the land to live in exile at the bidding of two beardless boys, for they are scarce more, who tread upon our necks, as though we were their vassals or their slaves?"

"True," replied Guglielmo, "the number of the exiled nobles increases every day. It is time to put a check upon the overgrown power that will otherwise annihilate us all."

"It must be done, and speedily," said Francesco; "but now let us follow to the show—our absence might be remarked. To-night, Lorenzo sups in private with Jacopo and the fair Clarice

Orsini, who have arrived from Rome. The day of the marriage will then be fixed. Little dreams the gentle bride that the name of the Medici will perish from the earth ere it can become her own."

The triumphant tone in which Francesco uttered these words, while they instilled confidence, yet made the heart of Guglielmo sicken, as he thought of the misery about to fall on so many innocent persons.

"We meet to-night," he said to Francesco, as they were about to leave the apartment.

"To-night, at Montughi," replied Francesco. "The hour will then finally be fixed; and woe to him who is found wanting when it arrives!" So saying, they separated; and each mounting his horse proceeded alone towards the scene of the amusement of the day, which they were to leave early, in order to debate afresh the most fitting moment for the accomplishment of their murderous deed.

Within three days after the masque at Fiesole the people of Florence were delighted by a spectacle, which, even in that intellectual age, still possessed an unaccountable charm in their eyes.

The combats of wild beasts, after the manner of the ancients, were a favourite pastime, although the progress of civilization had put an end to the most appalling part of the spectacle—the sacrifice of human life.

A large space, at the distance of a mile from the city, had been enclosed for the purpose. In the midst were trees, which had been partially stripped of their branches; and the dens of the animals were placed at intervals round the arena, and concealed from view by hangings and curtains which fell from the gallery above, containing rows of seats elevated one above the other, and protected by an awning from the heat of the sun. The expense of these entertainments was enormous; and so great the demand at that time for wild beasts, that each was bought at a price many times higher than it would have produced at a later day. This, when the great number that were sacrificed at each exhibition is considered, will account for the immense outlay required; and never did the popularity of Lorenzo rise to such a height with all classes of persons, as when, at his own expense, he revived these ancient combats.

The present exhibition had been judiciously appointed to take place immediately after the masque at Fiesole, in order that the poorer people should also have their share in the rejoicings, in honour of the renewal of the friendship of the Pope with the republic of Florence; for it was ever a part of the wise policy of Lorenzo to combine the interest of the state with the individual gratification of its citizens. Thousands of persons flocked to the arena; and it was whispered in the crowd, that, besides the ordinary exhibitions, something hitherto unknown was about to be displayed for their amusement. This did not, however, diminish the eagerness with which they watched the first onset between the furious animals, who, the better to excite their rage, had been kept for a considerable time without food.

At every fresh victory obtained by the enraged beasts over each other, the shouts of the people filled the air; and the animals, still more excited by the noise, added the most frightful roars to the fury with which they attacked their enemy. When any of them, either from cowardice or injury, refused to fight, he was instantly withdrawn to his

den by means of a net, which, running on a rope extending across the arena, could be dropped at pleasure, and was secured by a spring. By these means, only the more savage beasts remained; and such was the carnage, that, before the conclusion of the show, above twenty lions and tigers lay dead within the arena, besides panthers, leopards, hyenas, and a variety of lesser animals, which had played their part in this bloody spectacle, to the delight of the assembled multitude.

The fight had been prolonged for several hours; but the day was drawing to a close, when the gates of the arena were opened, and a number of keepers with their attendants having entered the

It was the first time the cameleopard had ever been seen in Europe; and although, from the recitals of travellers, the existence of such an animal might have been supposed to have been ascertained, yet it is a recorded fact, that, until the moment of its production at Florence by Lorenzo de' Medici, to whom it had been sent as a present by the Soldan of Egypt, the cameleopard had been always regarded by Europeans as a fabulous creation. After the savage nature of the previous scene, the gentleness of these beautiful animals was a subject of no less delight to the assembled multitude, than was their novel and striking appearance. The people seemed as if they could never tire watching the stately and peaceful movements of the gigantic animals, who, apparently undismayed by the surrounding crowd, cropped the leaves of the trees, and lifted their beautiful heads over the barriers, as if to take a nearer view of those for whose amusement they had been brought from their native land. But the silence was soon broken by exclamations of delight and wonder, and again the name of the Medici was heard around.

"It is for the last time," muttered Luca Pitti, as he turned his horse, to depart on his road to join the conspirators at Montughi. As he rode through the now deserted streets of the city, his own half-finished palace was the spot upon which his fierce looks rested, and he ground his teeth as he passed the walls. At the gate of the villa of Jacopo de' Pazzi, at Montughi, he overtook Francesco and Guglielmo, who were going to the meeting.

"What news?" exclaimed Francesco, as he reined up his horse beside that of Luca Pitti.

"Heaven smiles upon us," replied the latter.

"The Cardinal has requested that on Sunday high

CHAPTER XIX.

It was Sunday. Five days had elapsed, and Melanthe had not quitted the room to which she had been conveyed by the persons who had accompanied her to Fiesole; and who, after a long search, had found her, apparently lifeless, lying on the terrace where her interview with Montesecco had taken place. It was not without terror that the good Caterina beheld the pitiable state in which Melanthe was brought back to her house: but all that care and kindness could effect was speedily done for the young stranger; and when, at length, she was restored to consciousness, a few words sufficed to induce the kind-hearted Italians to believe that over-fatigue was alone the cause of the indisposition which had so much alarmed them.

But there was one near, who was not so easily deceived. Gennaro, whose own unhappy love had taught him those deep hidden secrets of the heart,

unfathomable to a spirit at ease, knew that neither illness nor fatigue could have thus prostrated the mental powers of Melanthe. Deeply now did he regret not having accompanied her to the masque. An undefined presentiment of sorrow had been the cause of his refusal to do so. Although ignorant of the arrival of Montesecco at Florence, Gennaro had frequently imagined the possibility of such an event; and his heart was ever oppressed by a fear of meeting the man to whom he knew the affections of Melanthe were devoted. He did not hate Montesecco—the love of Melanthe rendered him sacred; but Gennaro trembled in his presence. He trembled as though he imagined his rival to be in possession

every faculty has been strained to the utmost, it scarcely excites a sentiment of cold gratitude.

It is not, therefore, surprising that Gennaro, who was naturally superstitious, and whose mute sorrow rendered him doubly sensitive to impressions once formed, at length arrived at the conclusion that Montesecco possessed some peculiar gift from Heaven, which rendered him all powerful. Hitherto, Gennaro had forborne to allude to the past when in conversation with Melanthe; for conversation was, without difficulty, carried on between them, sometimes by signs, at others by writing, and for this purpose he always carried tablets of ivory. The same feeling of delicacy which had prevented him from speaking of Montesecco, had taught Gennaro to bury his own hopes within his bosom. He felt that Melanthe did not love him—that she considered him as a child; and although his young heart beat with all the noblest emotions of man, he preferred, in the gentleness of his nature, to remain in her eyes as she chose to regard him, rather than inflict upon her the pain which he had once seen that his professions of affection had caused. The steadiness with which Gennaro had followed

up this determination had worked its own reward; for, during their journey, they had seemed to be almost the friends of former days, and Melanthe had once again turned upon him her old sweet smile: And his heart had been comforted. Alas! was this also to vanish so soon?

From the moment when Gennaro had seen the inanimate form of Melanthe borne back to the chamber which she had quitted but a short time previously in spirits and in health, it seemed as though death had laid its icy fingers upon his heart. Day and night, he sat by the couch on which she lay, bathing with his tears the hand she unconsciously abandoned to him: but no comfort

had traced upon the tablet the question he longed to ask, restored the ivory to his bosom, as he gazed upon the wan cheek and fixed eyes of her he so much loved, and whose faculties appeared frozen by some secret pain. He could not add to her sorrow, and he bore on in silence, although his heart was breaking. And thus, for many days, these two young creatures sat side by side, looking on each other's grief—soul watching soul, as its frail tenement seemed fading from the earth; and yet neither knew to the full extent the sorrow of the other.

This could not last. Death or madness must ensue, if an effort were not made, and the stronger mind was the first to awake from the stupor of distress. Melanthe looked upon the cheek of Gennaro. It was hollow, and his colourless lips were thin and pinched. Was it for her that he thus grieved? She laid her hand gently upon his shoulder. He started, and looked up, and joy, like the flash of a sunbeam, played across his pallid face as he marked the look of kindness which Melanthe turned upon him. She made him a sign to give her the tablets; and taking them hastily

from his hand, she read the words which he had traced, but had not shown to her. One line contained a prayer that she would confide to him the secret of her grief. "To-morrow, you shall know all!" was the answer she wrote; and Gennaro threw himself upon his knees before her, and passionately kissed her hands. Melanthe, with a faint sad smile, pointed to the door, and, satisfied that she was now recovering, Gennaro instantly withdrew.

Then Melanthe knelt down, and prayed; and she arose comforted! She did not weep. It was the hour for endurance, not for tears; and all that night she sat alone, communing with herself.

She looked back upon her past life: and satisfied that

but the image of the Cardinal Borgia rose before her ; and she trembled, and shrunk, as though in his hated presence, whilst the words he had uttered in his rage recurred to her mind,—“ *Montesecco shall spurn thee while kneeling at his feet !*” She had knelt at his feet, and *he had spurned her !* The recollection nearly overwhelmed the fortitude of the unhappy girl ; but soon the loftiness which was inherent in her nature, came to her support. Montesecco had scorned her professions of innocence. Should she humble herself before one who had doubted her honour, and refused to give credence to her word ? Could she stoop to receive as a boon, that which she regarded as a right ? It must not be. Secure in her conscious integrity, and pureness of faith, she would meet him on equal terms, or relinquish him for ever ; and, as she dwelt upon these thoughts, again the spirit of pride arose to chase away the shadow of her grief. But it was pride of her lover, not of herself. He thought her guilty, and he renounced her. His high sense of honour forbade all other course ; and Melanthe, in the unflinching nobleness of her soul, admired and approved even while her woman’s

heart quailed beneath the blow. It was clear that Montesecco had been deceived ; and her mind reverted to the Cardinal, who was the only enemy of whose existence she was aware. She knew the consummate artifice of Borgia, and felt that appearances might be made to justify his accusation ; and should Montesecco have been by them convinced of her unworthiness, and yet preserved his love, she would then have spurned, for she would

have despised him. The sincerity of these sentiments strengthened the courage with which Melanthe endeavoured to meet the difficulties of her position ; still there were moments when feelings of tenderness warred against the spirit of endurance, and the strife was bitter : but she struggled on, placing, as it were, her sorrow under the safeguard of conscious rectitude, and during the many hours of that sleepless night, she endeavoured to bring her senses under the control necessary to instant decision.

After mature deliberation, the plan which had at first occurred to her was that which she resolved to adopt—she would throw herself upon the mercy of him, who had so unhesitatingly condemned her, Jacopo Orsini, who, on the first whisper against

her, had expelled her from his house, was the person to whom she would address her prayer. He was the father of her early friend Clarice, and to his paternal feelings she would appeal for protection. She determined to write to him a full statement of all that she had suffered, and entreat his interference on behalf of her poor father, upon whose prolonged agony she ever thought in trembling.

This letter, with others for Hassan and her father, she resolved to entrust to Gennaro, to whom she was about to reveal all that she had hitherto kept secret from him; and having provided him with proper attendants, the means of doing which, from the jewels she wore, were in her power, she would send him to Rome; and retiring into one of the many Florentine convents, the doors of which were always open to strangers, she would await, under the protection of the abbess, intelligence of the result of his mission.

It might so happen that before that time Vanozia would have found the means of fulfilling her promise; a promise which she had made with such confidence of success, that Melanthe still trusted in its

accomplishment. The more simple course would have been at once to inform Lorenzo of all that had happened ; yet from this the nature of Melanthe shrunk with invincible repugnance ; and she resolved that nothing but the failure of every other support should induce her to make known her sorrows to the man who had been so unintentionally the cause of them.

Relieved by the decision she had formed, the mind of Melanthe grew more calm. She threw herself upon her couch, in the hope of obtaining repose ; but sleep, like love, is a wayward spirit, ever absent when most invoked. After some time,

palm, a few mulberry trees, and myrtle bushes, constituted the chief verdure of the garden of poor Caterina ; but there were roses, and the beautiful flowering cistus forcing their way in wild luxuriance among straggling clusters of jessamine and honeysuckle ; and, as Melanthe leaned from the window, the air was heavy with the fragrance of the flowers. There was something of sadness in their blooming thus alone in that secluded spot, clinging in helpless loveliness and with feeble grasp to those high frowning walls, that seemed to shut them out from kindred gladness in the sunny fields ; and Melanthe, as she looked at their beautiful heads, drooping with the heavy dew of the spring morning, felt a sensation of pity arise in her breast.

The tears of these bright things were as a type of her own sorrow ; and with a sigh she turned from the window, and sitting down at a table, upon which she had prepared her materials for writing, she began the letters, of which Gennaro was to be the bearer to Rome. She had not been long thus employed, when a sound beneath the window startled her. It was a sound of knocking, and the

hurried whisperings of voices reached her—then all was still. In a few moments, a heavy step was heard upon the stairs—nearer and nearer it came, then paused—the door of her room opened, and, wrapped in the large dark cloak worn by horsemen of that period, Montesecco stood before her. The astonishment of Melanthe gave way before the terror with which she gazed upon his altered appearance. Years seemed to have been added to his age, since she had last beheld him. His tall form was bent, his step uncertain, and the deadly paleness of his face betrayed the agony of mind he suffered.

no!" she added, with a shudder, "I will not believe it,—I could not do so."

The reproach these gentle words contained struck sharply to the heart of him to whom they were addressed; but the past was less in his thoughts than the present, and the terrible future. Love had given way to horror and despair, and he clasped his hands over his eyes while he replied,

"You must—you will; it is that you may fully do so, that I am now here,—that I have sought you even while death is on my track—death above, around, before me, everywhere I turn, nothing but death! Oh! I could have met it on the field, braved it a thousand times, or bid it welcome in the cause of honour, or of love; but to die a felon's death, a murderer! - - -"

"Ah!" said Melanthe, with a shriek, and looking wildly round, "who spoke of murder?" And, as she pronounced the word, she shuddered and advanced instinctively nearer to the side of Montesecco.

"I did!" he replied solemnly; "for the crime is mine!"

"Oh! do not speak such words," said Melanthe, raising her eyes, in agony, to the face of her lover.

"Yes!" he replied, "I am a murderer! The deed and the design are one—the sin is on my soul - - - And you—would you know the cause? would you know what has worked the ruin of him who loved you? - - - It is yourself!"

"I!" exclaimed Melanthe, looking at him with a bewildered air, "I the cause! It is impossible. This is some madness."

"No," replied Montesecco, sadly, "would that it were—that I might even for one short hour forget that I am Montesecco, and that you were once my own Melanthe! Oh! I am not mad! If you would know how this black intent seized upon my soul, turn your eyes inward—search your own false and changing heart; and, having sounded its most treacherous depths, look back to days gone by, when, blessed in each other's love, each hour was witness to our mutual vows. I was happy then! Of all the treasures that the earth contains, I coveted but one—that one was mine. I left it for a time unguarded—no, not unguarded, for the

spirit of my own truth watched over it. All was vain. It was stolen—stolen as I slept secure. I awoke—I was a beggar on the earth—and then I swore that he who had done this deed should answer for it to me with his life ! ”

“ Still then,” said Melanthe, struggling to appear calm, “ you believe me guilty ? ”

“ Would to Heaven that I could doubt it ! ” exclaimed Montesecco, passionately.

“ ’Tis well ! ” said Melanthe, as she bowed her head ; but the tone of her voice was so low it did not reach the ear of Montesecco, who continued rapidly,

“ From that hour, I had but one thought. I joined the conspiracy long since formed against the Medici. I joined it heart and hand,—I longed to glory in the act that was to avenge my love, and only prayed that I might strike the blow that was to spill the life-blood of the hated Lorenzo ! For this, I came to Florence ; for this, I stooped to come ambassador from him, who, safe in the papal chair, sends forth his myrmidons of murder beneath the cope and stole. For this, I left the soldier’s

honourable strife to act the assassin's part. The masque at Fiesole was to have been the hour - - -"

"*Was!*" interrupted Melanthe; "then, it is not too late. Lorenzo lives—oh! tell me that yet he lives!"

"One hour from hence I dare not say 'He lives!'" replied Montesecco, as he cast a glance upon the brightening day.

"Oh fly! save him! save yourself!" cried Melanthe, distractedly.

"It is too late!" said Montesecco. "I have renounced the deed. I stand before you a twofold traitor. Oh! Melanthe, why did we meet at Fiesole? Had we not met, I could have struck the blow, and died! But now, irresolution has destroyed me. I saw you, and I thought, Lorenzo dead, what then must be your fate? I thought on this, and found I could not kill the man that loved you. Oh! I am mad, when I think of this—I, who so worshipped you!" and Montesecco, covering his face with his hands, sobbed aloud.

In the midst of grief and terror a thrill of rapture shot through the heart of Melanthe.

Montesecco still loved her - - - But these thoughts were for the future; for beneath the anguish of her lover she felt the terrible secret lay yet concealed. She approached him, and unheeding the construction he might put upon her words, her only thought being to save him from the guilt into which he had been hurried, she said,

“ There is yet time; Lorenzo must be saved! Speak—say, how it may be done.”

“ It is too late. Hark!” he exclaimed, as the slow peal of a church bell was heard. “ The murderers are round him. In the church of the Reparata there is high mass—when the priest raises the host, then will Lorenzo die. Two priests even now make ready the dagger beneath their robe; and I, who had sworn to do it, fly like a craven ere the hour arrives. I said *I dared not* in the house of God;—but you, Melanthe, you were my God. I, pitied you! Oh! may all-pitying Heaven forgive me, I know not what I say!”

“ God will forgive, if you repent,” said Melanthe.

“ Repent,” said Montesecco with a stupified air.

Just then, the sound of voices and the trampling of many feet was heard beneath the window.

“ They have murdered him,” he whispered hoarsely ; “ and now they are looking for me—a traitor to both sides—they seek my life ! ”

The bell tolled louder, and Melanthe sprung to the window :—“ The people flock to the church—he may yet be warned - - - Oh God, support me ! ”

Melanthe, as she spoke, endeavoured hurriedly to adjust the hood and scarf of black silk, without which no woman of condition ever appeared in the street ; but her hands trembled so she could scarcely accomplish tying the strings. “ Lorenzo—

“ she cannot be near the church. Hark ! oh ! for one toll more to tell that yet he lives.” All was silent - - -

“ It is too late ! ” he said, with a deep groan ; and, as he closed the window, he buried his head in the folds of his cloak, as if to shut out the dreadful sound which he knew must be the next.

CHAPTER XX.

By the side of the Arno, near the spot where the river first enters Florence, was a small piece of enclosed ground, cut off from view of the city by a high wall, which was shaded by a double row of Ilex and Cypress trees. The bank sloped gradually down to the water, and was so covered with flowering shrubs, that it might have seemed a garden, had not the gleaming of marble, and the occasional elevation of a crucifix or obelisk, proclaimed that beneath the shelter of the flowers, hearts once as full of life as the bright blossoms in their gay spring time, now mouldered in the dust ! Many a gentle device, and many a rose-crowned urn, told of the tenderness which had outlived the parting hour ; and garlands of fresh flowers, suspended from the trees, marked out the place of the nameless grave, with a grace of sorrow more touching and more

true than could have been conveyed by any effort of the sculptor's art.

One tomb alone, of most elaborate workmanship, reared itself proudly so as to stand apart from the rest. Raised on a grassy mound, a bower of myrtle sheltered it from the sun; and on the tomb and all around its base, the sweetest blossoms of that glowing clime lay scattered in profusion - - - The sun had scarcely shone upon the earth, yet ever and anon a fragrant cloud was wafted on the air. But whose is the hand now raised to feed its flame? A young man kneels before the tomb; his long black curls fall downward on his cheek, as, lower and lower still, he bends his head, until his lips have rested on the slab beneath. It is Giuliano de' Medici. What does he there? Grief sits upon his brow; and as, with clasped hands, he gazes on the tomb, the one word that seems to struggle to his sight as through the blinding tears he looks upon it, tells his sad tale—that word was “Simonetta!” the name of her who slept below; the name that but a little while before woke rapture in the soul of one, who with a loving ear drank in

its sound; and, from his breaking heart, the sad Giuliano vainly sighs—that word once more,—no answer comes; the ear is closed, the lips are silent now; and Giuliano kneels again, and weeps - - -

At this time, Giuliano de' Medici had scarcely reached his nineteenth year. Gifted with great personal beauty, and a highly accomplished mind, he was universally admired. Many were the bright glances that sought his own; but he heeded them not, for his heart was with the gentle Simonetta. Her parents smiled upon his suit, and for a brief space of time he was most blest. But little recks the hand of death what ties it severs. A few days' illness, and Simonetta was gone, snatched away

to the resting place of her he had so fondly loved ! Vain had been all the efforts of his friends to induce him once more to join in their pursuits. The wound was too fresh ; and Lorenzo compassionating a weakness with which he could so deeply sympathize, forbore for a time to insist upon the appearance of his brother in public, feigning to believe in the constantly urged plea of indisposition.

The grief of Giuliano had been the cause of his absence from the masque at Fiesole ; and although it was not then publicly known, a rumour of the truth had subsequently reached the ears of the conspirators, filling them with fear, that, should he persist in remaining in seclusion, their plan of a double murder must prove abortive. The secret of the conspiracy was now known to so many, that every hour was fraught with danger. More than once, symptoms of wavering had manifested themselves, and it became of imperative necessity to determine the moment of the enterprise. Fearful that, should the celebration of another festival be selected, the same difficulty would again occur which had caused the failure of the attempt at

Fiesole, it was decided, that the occasion of a religious ceremony should be chosen; and the Legate, who was completely a puppet in the hands of the Archbishop and of his father Girolano Riario, was incited to express his desire of being present at the celebration of high mass in the church of the Reparata.

The time had now arrived; the Legate and the Archbishop set out from their respective residences with a splendid retinue, in which were comprised the chief number of the conspirators. Lorenzo also had quitted his palace; and the murderers already smiled in anticipation of success, when it was ascertained that Giuliano had left his house early in the morn-

with the delicacy all feel for true sorrow, they refrained from exposing the grief of a master they loved, to the careless gaze of strangers.

The irritation of Francesco amounted almost to frenzy. He strode up and down the street, looking in all directions, but in vain. The bell had ceased tolling—the service was begun, and each moment that went by threatened destruction and discovery; for, should Lorenzo fall alone, the people would instantly rally round Giuliano, and not one of the conspirators could hope for escape. The excitement of Francesco was so strong, that he trembled all over; his knees knocked together as he walked, and every instant he seemed as though he would have fallen to the ground; when at length, after a little more time spent in fruitless watching, an exclamation from Bandini revived his courage; and Giuliano appeared in sight, walking slowly down the street, at some distance. Making a strong effort to regain his composure, Francesco, accompanied by Bandini, advanced to meet him, and, holding out his hand, exclaimed, gaily,

“ Why, dear Giuliano, one would think you had turned hermit, save that a holy man would

scarcely absent himself so often from his cell. We have been seeking you every day—but in vain.”

“ I have been unwell,” replied Giuliano, gently, “ or you should not have found me thus uncourteous.”

“ We come to pray you will honour the Legate and the Archbishop, by attending the mass which is even now being celebrated in their presence,” said Bandini, in the hope of giving his companion time to recover his composure.

“ Good friends, forgive me,” replied Giuliano; “ indeed, I cannot go.”

“ It will be most discourteous to your guests,” suggested Bandini.

as a faint blush stole over his cheek at this allusion to his grief.

“ He did indeed ; and as it is upon so solemn an occasion, I would entreat you to accede to his request. It is many days now since you have appeared in public,” answered Francesco.

“ My brother is so kind,” observed Giuliano, as if forgetting the presence of his visitors, “ so very kind, he will forgive it.”

Francesco cast a look of despair upon Bandini ; and the latter, addressing Giuliano, observed,

“ You will not, surely, refuse this simple request of so good a brother. Lorenzo entreats you, through us, to attend upon him this once—he is urgent in his prayer.”

“ So urgent,” suggested Francesco, who perceived that Giuliano began to hesitate in his determination, “ that there is surely some weighty reason for his anxiety.”

“ You think so ?” asked Giuliano ; and Francesco slightly winced under the calm searching glance Giuliano turned upon him. Was it possible that any suspicion of their intentions was the cause

of the reluctance of Giuliano to enter the church? The alarm of Francesco, however, was not of long duration; for Giuliano, totally unsuspecting of danger, and imagining that, as they had hinted, so there possibly might exist some weighty reason for the anxiety of Lorenzo for his presence, resolved to conquer the repugnance he felt, and to be present at the mass.

“ I am ready to attend you,” he said to Francesco, at the same time moving a few steps onwards.

“ You have forgotten your cloak and sword,” observed Francesco, after they had walked a little

useless," he added, as, with much courtesy, he bent his head towards Giuliano.

"Your words are too flattering," replied the latter; "but it were ungrateful to the good citizens of Florence, did I contradict your speech. They love us even as we love them."

"One need only to look around," observed Bandini; "the proofs of love rise up on every side. Cosmo, Piero, and now your most honoured brother, Lorenzo, live in the hearts of the people."

"And Giuliano," added the wily Francesco; "for though the youngest, not the least beloved;" and, as he spoke, he leaned his arm familiarly on the shoulder of Giuliano, pressing as he did so his fingers on the loose silk frock, in order to ascertain whether any defensive armour was concealed beneath it. But his fears were soon calmed. The warm soft flesh in which ere long he hoped to sheath the murderous dagger which he wore, was all that met his touch; and with revived hopes Francesco continued to lead him forward, beguiling the time with gay remark and honied word, until they had reached the door of the church. It was crowded

to excess; but all gave way as Giuliano entered; and a place was soon found for him on the opposite side from that which was occupied by Lorenzo; and there, meekly elevating his soul to God, Giuliano, with one of his executioners on either side, stood like a victim ready for the sacrifice !

CHAPTER XXI.

It was not without much difficulty that Melanthe reached the church of the Reparata. More than once, she had mistaken the way which had been pointed out to her; and the streets being at that hour nearly deserted, she had been obliged to retrace her steps in order to obtain fresh directions. Each delay aggravated the excitement under which she suffered; and irritated almost to madness she hurried on, struggling against the feeling which, similar to that by which the sleeper is sometimes oppressed, seemed to retain her steps at the very moment when haste was the most requisite. Trembling and exhausted, she at length arrived at the church; but, on passing its portals, the mass of human beings which presented itself to her view, was so great, that, to find Lorenzo amongst them, appeared an almost hopeless attempt.

She endeavoured to advance towards the altar, but found it impossible. Breathless with fear, she paused for an instant to listen to the voice of the Priest ; and with a shudder recognised the words of the short prayer which precedes the consecration of the Host. To cry aloud to Lorenzo to save himself was her first impulse ; but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. One word of alarm might be his death warrant, for she knew the church was filled with his foes. She was in

the midst of them, hemmed in on every side. Oh ! for one moment of power to move—to see—to decide on what was best to be done. Must she stand there mute and helpless, with the dread secret on her lips, and the dagger of the murderers pointed at the breast of their victim ? The thought was maddening ; her sight failed her, and her brain whirled, beneath the fierce struggle to repress every symptom of alarm, for she knew that assassin eyes were glaring around, watchful of each stir, lest any accident might reveal their deadly purpose an instant ere the time.

One effort, and he may yet be warned ! Melanthe drew her hood more closely over her

face, and with a swift though steady step withdrew entirely from the crowd, and, gliding along behind the pillars, came at length within view of the spot occupied by Lorenzo. It was a little to the right of the altar, in front of which were placed chairs for the Legate, the Archbishop, and some of the chief stranger guests; while Giuliano occupied the seat corresponding with that filled by his brother. To the left of Lorenzo, Melanthe instantly recognised Angelo Politiano, and others, who had been pointed out to her at Fiesole as the most intimate friends of the Medici; but her heart froze within her, as she saw the cowls of the two priests, his destined murderers, who filled the place immediately behind Lorenzo. One rapid glance assured her that he was still safe. A second later, and all would have been lost! She had contrived to pass the outer ranks of those who stood before her, when she heard the words resound from the altar, which were to be the death signal.

“ *Hoc est enim Corpus meum!* ” solemnly pronounced the Priest, as he raised the consecrated host. The bell rang, and every knee was bent, and every head was bowed, when, with a fearful

shriek, Melanthe threw herself suddenly forward, for she saw the cowed figure rise and the dagger gleam !

“ Lorenzo, save thyself ! ” was all she could utter, as, with a violent effort, she caught the uplifted arm of the murderer. He staggered, and the half averted blow fell faintly upon the neck of Lorenzo, inflicting a slight wound. The pain made him start from the ground, and, wrapping his cloak

round his left arm, he drew his sword, and struck down his assailant at the very moment that a figure darting from behind, and endeavouring to clasp Melanthe in its arms, received the blow intended by the second priest for Lorenzo, and fell dead at his feet. It was poor Gennaro ! Faithful to the last, he had followed to protect her whom he loved, and in the effort he had perished !

“ Melanthe ! is it thus we meet again ? ” cried Lorenzo, as he sprung to her side, and, grasping her with one arm, defended himself with the other as he strove to gain the door of the sacristy, which was only a few paces behind him.

In an instant, the alarm spread around ; and a party of his friends, rushing to his succour, made a

rampart of their persons, and by pressing backwards, succeeded in clearing the entrance. Having placed Lorenzo in safety within the sacristy, Angelo Politiano closed the brazen doors.

The tumult in the church had become fearful. Giuliano, struck down with too fatal aim by Francesco and Bandini, lay dead before the altar; and such was the fury with which Francesco continued his attack, even after life had quitted the body, that he inflicted a severe wound upon himself, and fell prostrate by the side of his victim. The Legate, in an agony of terror, and surrounded by the priests, had taken refuge on the altar as a sanctuary: while the Archbishop, seeing Giuliano murdered, did not wait to ascertain the fate of Lorenzo, but quitted the church with thirty followers, in order to repair to the palace of the Signoria, and, proclaiming the death of the Medici, seize upon the seat of government, and reduce the magistrates to obedience.

The two priests, aware of the consequences which the failure of their attempt would produce as soon as it was known, silently crept from the church, and fled from the city. So great was the confusion

which prevailed in the first few moments of the attack, that those who were at the farther end of the church, could not immediately ascertain the cause of the disturbance, and, misled by the cry of "Fire!" which had been raised by the conspirators, rushed into the open air; while some, imagining that the roof was falling, fled away with shrieks of terror, thereby increasing the uproar and confusion to such an extent, that it was with difficulty they could be made to understand what had happened.

As soon, however, as they comprehended the matter, with one accord all returned, and, forming themselves into a body, entreated Lorenzo to place himself in the midst of them; then quitting the church by another door, that they might prevent his immediately seeing the body of Giuliano, which still lay before the altar, they conducted him safely to his own palace, and continued, supported by a body of troops, to keep guard over him.

Meanwhile, the Archbishop was making his way to the palace of the Signoria. On his arrival, he inquired whether any of the magistrates were in attendance, having, as he said, a communication of importance to make to them. His high rank pro-

cured him instant admittance ; and, leaving some of his attendants with orders to seize upon the gates at a given signal, he entered the palace, accompanied by the rest. The room, which joined that in which the magistrates were wont to assemble, was of a circular form ; and the Archbishop, who, it appeared, was aware of this circumstance, no sooner had entered the chamber, than he sent forward the officer by whom he was conducted, and directed the conspirators to close the doors gently as soon as he had passed, and then to await his signal from the inside room, when they were to rush in, and secure or put to death all who should offer any resistance.

“ You understand,” he said, turning to his followers, ere he quitted the room. “ I will go in as though I had business which I would transact with the magistrates ; and by standing close to the door you will be able to ascertain how many persons are present. If I cough once, then there will be only four or five ; but should you hear me cough several times, then be sure that the assembly is larger, and prepare your weapons, as the number of the enemy may give them courage ; but do not slay when you

can overpower without it. Do you understand me?"

"We do," replied several voices; and the Archbishop pushed the door, which had been left half open by the attendant, and disappeared through it.

He little suspected that the very means he had taken to secure his safety, would tend to his destruction. The room in which he had left his followers, was one which belonged to the Gonfalonière, or Chief Magistrate; and, to protect his

person from treachery, it was customary, upon the election of each Gonfalonière, to change the locks and doors in a manner only known to himself and such as had charge of the palace. This information, not having been bestowed upon the Archbishop, he unsuspectingly allowed the door to close as he quitted the room; the secret spring moved, and his attendants were imprisoned by his own hand. Unconscious of danger, he advanced to the inner chamber, expecting to find it occupied by few persons, instead of which, having been summoned accidentally upon some question of state, the whole body of the Signoria was present.

Cesare Petrucci, the Gonfalonière, was the first

person who met the eye of the Archbishop, who would have willingly encountered any number of strangers, rather than have been thus suddenly brought into contact with this man. The Gonfalonière instantly rose to receive him ; and seeing that he remained standing near the door, begged that he would advance, at the same time placing a chair near his own seat at the head of the table. The Archbishop glanced round the circle ; but, as he raised his eyes to those of the Gonfalonière, and met the calm and resolute glance of the man whom he knew to be as much distinguished by his courage as by his virtue and talents, the firmness of the conspirator began to waver, and, without taking the proffered seat, he said, hurriedly,

“ I thank you—but I would not interrupt your conference. My business—is—is of a nature - - -” and stopping suddenly, he looked uneasily around.

“ Of a secret nature, perhaps,” suggested the Gonfalonière. “ If so, the hour is well chosen. From the Signoria, we have no secrets. Will it please your Lordship to sit ?” he added, again offering the chair ; but the Archbishop only re-

treated nearer to the door, and seemed to have been suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing.

"I will not detain you," he said, when it had subsided; "but," and he turned his head anxiously towards the door of the circular chamber, which was visible from the spot where he stood; "but the Pope—his Holiness I mean - -"

"What of his Holiness?" asked the Gonfalonière, apparently quite at a loss to account for the extraordinary hesitation of his visitor.

"He has commanded me," he replied, and again his cough interrupted him; "Great Heaven," he said to himself, "can it be that they do not hear me? The door does not move." He, in vain, endeavoured to control the emotion which every instant was gaining strength over him.

"It grieves me to see your Lordship stand like a menial at the door—will it not please you to be seated?" asked the Gonfalonière, who, like most people in authority at that period, being constantly exposed to treacherous attacks, was on his guard, and already suspected something from the pertinacity with which his visitor retained his position at the door.

“ I will stand here,” replied the Archbishop, “ if you will permit it ; but I thank you for your attention,” he added, with an attempted gesture of courtesy, which was rendered ludicrous by the agitation of his manner. “ It gives me much pleasure to inform you, that your son—but here - - -” and he began to draw from his bosom a variety of papers, which, one after another, from the trembling of his fingers, slipped from his grasp, and fell upon the floor.

“ My Lord the Archbishop is surely indisposed,” exclaimed one of the Signoria, as he stooped to pick up the papers, at the same time turning a meaning glance upon the Gonfalonière, upon whose brow he now read a confirmation of his own awakened suspicions.

“ I much fear it,” he replied. “ Nay, my Lord, you are very pale—this business will wait—let me summon your attendants.”

“ No, no !” cried the Archbishop, coughing still louder than before. “ It is nothing—I would deliver these credentials—the Pope ! My God, I am lost !” he exclaimed apart, as he strove to hold out the papers ; but the trembling of his hands had

now extended to his whole body, and he shook from head to foot, while, with a face livid from agony, he continued to watch the door, which still remained closed.

"Help! help! the Archbishop is ill," cried the Gonfalonière, fully persuaded that some treachery was afloat.

"Support him—see, his cough distracts him. Let some one summon his servants. You left them, I conclude, at the palace gate," he added with a glance so keen and full of meaning that the Archbishop, to whom the last words were addressed, completely lost what little self-possession his terror had hitherto left him.

"No, not the gate," he exclaimed; "the round room—that door—open it. Will no one open it?" he cried with a shriek, in the faint hope that he might yet be heard by his followers.

"The round room! Then they are safe! Secure the traitor—call up the guard," cried the Gonfalonière, drawing his sword, and rushing from the chamber.

In an instant, the Archbishop was seized; while, in a paroxysm of terror, he shouted to his attend-

ants for succour. They heard his voice, but were unable to extricate themselves; while the Gonfalonière pressing forwards with shouts of "Treason!" endeavoured to arouse the attention of the servants and attendants of the court.

He had reached the top of the stairs, when a man bounding up the steps struck at him, ere he could reach him. The blow fell harmless on the balustrade, and the sword shivered on the marble, as the Gonfalonière seized the conspirator, whom he recognised as Giacopo Poggio. Dragging him by the hair into the chamber of the Signoria, he was, after a short struggle, securely bound by the side of the Archbishop, who, mute with the certainty of coming death, had passively submitted to be tied hand and foot to the heavy marble table in the centre of the room.

The alarm within the palace was now general. The followers of the Archbishop, who had been left to secure the gates, hearing the noise, and not receiving the expected summons from their companions within, suspected the cause; and, abandoning their post, rushed into the palace to the succour of their friends, but were instantly seized,

cut to pieces by the magistrates, who, with their guards and attendants, had armed themselves with any weapon they could find, and cut down all who attempted resistance.

Many of the rebels, finding themselves without a leader, submitted; and the gates of the palace having been secured, the Signoria assembled themselves in an upper room, to decide upon the course they were to pursue. Scarcely had they entered the chamber, when their ears were assailed by the cry of "liberty! liberty!" from the street; and throwing open the window, they saw the venerable Jacopo de' Pazzi, mounted on a horse covered with ribbons, and followed by about a hundred soldiers, crying out "liberty!" and exhorting the people to join them. These were reinforced by a small body of troops, which came from the opposite end of the city; and the magistrates perceived that an immediate attack upon the gates of the palace was meditated.

Misled by the supposition that the Archbishop was by this time master of the palace, the insurgents drew up before the gates, and demanded admittance. The answer they received was a volley

of stones; and with a wild cry of "the Pazzi and liberty!" they rushed to the attack, and, aided by the superiority of numbers, in a few minutes forced the gates. But their triumph was short; for the inmates of the palace, being now fully roused, hurried to the support of those who had given way; the rebels were repulsed, and after a sharp conflict, carried on almost hand to hand, the court was cleared and the gates again closed. At this instant, a large body of troops, escorted by an immense crowd, appeared at the end of the street; and the assailants, whose number was fearfully decreased, abandoned their attempt upon the palace, and fled in all directions.

CHAPTER XXII.

SCARCELY had the magistrates recovered from the suddenness of the attack which they had

so gallantly repelled, when the body of people, whose approach had dispersed the insurgents, reached the palace, and the cries of the foremost announced to the Signoria the strange and terrible events which had occurred in the church ! But, as the soldiers advanced, a feeling of sorrow seemed to take place of the rage which the populace had exhibited the moment before ; and the crowd gave way as the troops filed to the right and left of the square, and presented to view the mournful procession which entered the gates of the palace.

Borne upon a temporary bier, the body of the murdered Giuliano was followed by his brother, and a large proportion of the nobles and citizens of Florence. Struggling with a grief almost too

heavy to bear, Lorenzo made a sign to the bearers to set down the corpse upon the steps of the palace; and, although the blood still trickled from his own wound, it was not of himself he thought, as, withdrawing the cloak, which had been thrown over the corpse, the mangled limbs, from which the flesh had been actually torn by the violence of the blows, lay exposed to every eye.

Lorenzo did not speak. He simply pointed to the body of his murdered brother—then clasping his hands, extended them towards the magistrates and people. The mute sorrow of this appeal was far more eloquent than words; and as, overcome by grief, he suffered himself to be led away by his friends, a deafening shout of execration against the murderers rose from every quarter of the city; while the cries of “Palle! Palle! Viva Lorenzo!” were intermingled with demands for instant vengeance, and entreaties that the traitors should be given up to the people.

For a few moments the Signoria deliberated, but the arrival of a body of troops, bringing with them the already half-dead Francesco de' Pazzi, determined the course that it was necessary to pursue.

The people no sooner discovered that the actual murderer of Giuliano was in the palace, than their fury rose to such a height, as to threaten more danger than might have been apprehended from the insurgents. With difficulty the soldiers prevented the populace from breaking down the walls; and many of the most influential of the citizens addressing the people, entreated their patience, while the magistrates within were deciding upon the fate of the prisoners.

“Death! death to the traitors! Give them to us! ‘Tear them in pieces!” was the cry on all sides; while the crowd gathered, and stones were even thrown at the doors and windows of the palace, to quicken the movements of those within.

The whole population of Florence was by this time in a state of alarm; every instant fresh numbers flocked to the spot, and the uproar continued to increase. The people, excited to frenzy, had begun a furious attack upon the gates, when all at once the clamour ceased, and from that raving multitude not a sound was heard, while every eye was rivetted to one spot.

The balcony of the principal window of the

palace was exactly opposite to the gates. From the stone work of this balcony, which projected several feet from the wall, two men were busily employed in adjusting ropes ; and soon the sacred robes of the Archbishop were visible, as he was forced along by two soldiers, and lifted upon the edge of the balustrade. The noose was adjusted ; and Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, was hanged like a common felon before the eyes of the astonished people. On one side, Giacompo Poggio, on the other, Francesco de' Pazzi shared the same fate ; and as the Archbishop, in his agony, found himself close beside the man whom he looked upon as the chief instigator of the conspiracy, his rage was so uncontrollable, that he seized with his teeth the naked arm of the murderer, and held it until death put an end alike to his hatred and his power.

The shout of exultation with which this barbarous exhibition was received, proved to the Signoria that the advice of the Gonfalonière had at least been judicious ; and that any mode of vengeance less public, or more mild, would only have kept alive the spirit of anger until it merged into one of distrust towards the authorities which

had thwarted their desires of vengeance. The people, satisfied for the time, dispersed to seek in other parts of the city objects for their rage; and before the close of the day, almost every person connected with the conspiracy was in the hands of the government. Some few were executed immediately; while others were thrown into prison, in order to obtain a more full disclosure of the plot.

Amongst these, was Luca Pitti, who, having fallen into the hands of the populace, as he was endeavouring to make his escape from the city, had been so maltreated that he was not expected to survive. Jacopo de' Pazzi had also been taken by them; and as he had been seen publicly inciting the people to revolt, no chance of escape was left to him; and the old man, who, against his better judgment, had been dragged from the peaceful retirement of his villa to become the leader of an insurrection, was hanged from the balcony of the palace, by the side of his nephew, Francesco, whose restless ambition and hatred of the Medici had been the mainspring of this infamous conspiracy.

For some days the bodies of the murderers were suffered to remain exposed, until the public rage

having somewhat moderated, they were taken down from the balcony and buried. That of Jacopo de' Pazzi was interred in the Church of Santa Croce ; but no sooner was the fact publicly known, than the tumult awoke again. The people rose in a mass, declaring that some awful visitation would fall upon their city, if the body of a murderer were suffered to remain within its walls. The fact that a torrent of rain so incessant and violent, as to be deemed supernatural, had fallen ever since such an offence against the sanctity of their church had been committed, was adduced by them as a proof of the anger of Heaven ; and the magistrates, anxious to calm the excitement of the people by appearing to yield to their prejudices, gave orders for the removal of the body to a distance from the city. But not even there was it suffered to remain in peace. A multitude of children, eager to imitate the spirit of fury they had witnessed in others, dragged the corpse from the grave ; and, after treating it with every indignity they could devise, threw it into the Arno.

The two priests, who had undertaken the murder of Lorenzo, were discovered in a Benedictine

monastery, and literally torn to pieces by the enraged populace.

Thus the chief actors in the conspiracy met, almost instantaneously, the fate they deserved: but there was one, who alone contrived to escape to a distance, and for some time eluded all the efforts of the Florentines to discover his retreat. This was Bernardo Bandini, who, with Francesco, had been the actual murderer of Giuliano. He saved himself by flight; and it was not for two years afterwards that he was discovered at Constantinople, having incautiously betrayed his secret. Mahomet II., aware of the anxiety of the republic of Florence to secure him, and being desirous of conciliating Lorenzo, caused Bandini to be seized, and sent home in chains, to receive the reward of his crime.

Thus ended a conspiracy, which, from the high rank and sacred calling of most of its chief actors, as well as the length of time the wanton spirit of hatred and ambition had been secretly nursed in the bosom of so many ere it was suffered to break forth, forms one of the most remarkable plots recorded in history.

The attempt to annihilate the power of the Medici, although ostensibly based upon a principle of liberty, was in fact but the desire of substituting one power for another. Had it succeeded, it would have remained still to be decided, whether the ambition of the Pope, aided by the revengeful spirit of the Archbishop of Pisa, for the affront offered to him by Lorenzo, or the hatred and jealousy of the Pazzi, goaded on by the discontent of Luca Pitti, and others of the principal nobles, each secretly hoping to supplant the other, would have triumphed. In either case, individual interest being the real motive, the grandeur or welfare of the republic could scarcely have derived benefit from the change; and the attempt to subvert the authority of the Medici, like all demonstrations of a spirit of rebellion against a government in no wise tyrannical, only created the evil they affected to deprecate.

From the fall of the Pazzi, may be dated all the inclination to despotism, of which, in after-days, the Medici were accused. Hitherto, they had ruled through the affections of the people; and the glorious inscription upon the tomb of Cosmo,

so beautifully called, "the Father of his people!" sufficiently demonstrates the estimation in which they were held. The short but gentle rule of Piero did not belie the promise of his sire; but upon the young Lorenzo, the hopes and hearts and pride of the Florentines were doubly fixed.

Lorenzo, whose unbounded generosity and powers of intellect and taste had early procured for him the title of "The Magnificent," was the idol of the people. In him, they saw united, even from his boyish days, all the justness of opinion, promptitude of action, and earnest love and pride of his country, which had distinguished his ancestors: added to which, the high cultivation of his extraordinary mental powers, and his exquisite appreciation of the merits of science and the arts, elevated him so much beyond all who had gone before, that his fellow citizens looked up to him not only with reverence and affection, but also with the proud feeling of minds capable of the just desire of fame; as one, through whose almost miraculous gifts, their country and their name might be in after-ages gloriously celebrated. With these sentiments, it is not surprising, that the violence of grief and

anger which, upon the discovery of the conspiracy of the Pazzi, pervaded every Florentine bosom, should have driven a people naturally sensitive and excitable, beyond the bounds of justice or forbearance. It was with great difficulty that they were prevented from breaking into the prisons, in order to tear limb from limb the conspirators confined there.

The news of the wound of Lorenzo caused a general panic; and night and day crowds surrounded his house, filling the air with lamentations for Giuliano, and prayers for the recovery of Lorenzo. More than once he was obliged to show himself, to convince them that his wound was not of a serious nature. Notwithstanding that he was bowed down with grief, his address to the people was mild and courteous; and his most urgent and only prayer was, that they would allow the magistrates to decide upon the fate of the prisoners, and not, by an ill-regulated violence, confound the guilty with those who perhaps might be found to have been only partially implicated in the conspiracy.

The good sense of Lorenzo produced a beneficial effect; and he was rewarded for his forbearance

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CHAPTER XXIII.

WHILE the city of Florence was still disturbed by these fierce and tragical occurrences, Melanthe remained at home, weighed down by grief. Yielding to the urgency of her entreaties, Lorenzo, after the first alarm had subsided, had reluctantly consented to allow her to return to the house of Caterina; and Melanthe had been conducted thither by an escort of his most trusty friends, who would willingly have borne along in triumph one, whom they justly looked upon as the saviour of him who was so dear to them.

Having fulfilled the duty which she had been called upon to perform, Melanthe sought anxiously to withdraw herself from public notice; and having only asked of Lorenzo permission to conceal the manner by which she had been made acquainted with

the danger in which he stood, she retired to her humble abode, and took her station by the body of Gennaro, which, at her request, had been conveyed from the church to the house of Caterina. And now, as she sat beside the breathless form of the poor Greek boy, who had been her constant friend through so many difficulties and dangers, she felt, indeed, that life had as completely closed for her as for the inanimate clay upon which her tears

were falling. The untimely fate of Gennaro seemed to cast a still darker shadow around her. She was the cause of his death; and as he lay cold and immoveable before her, her mind wandered back to scenes of other days. She thought upon the many years when, ere passion had kindled or pride had hardened the heart of either, Gennaro had been to her as a brother,—when, as children, they had played together, studied the same task, and when the infirmity with which he had been afflicted had only endeared him still more to those who knew the gentleness and affection of his nature.

These days had passed; yet scarcely had the

grace of manhood begun to mingle with the wild gaiety of the boy, when the smile vanished from his lips, and the flush of his glowing cheek grew pale. Why had this been so? The heart of Melanthe sunk as it replied, "because of his love for her." He had loved her, and she, scornful and unpitying, had despised his affection. In the fullness of her own content, or the selfishness of her own grief, she had scarcely given a thought to his sorrow, nay, had sometimes even forgotten his very existence, until reminded of it by the sweet officiousness of love, which brought him ever to her side in the moment of danger or distress. And she had received his succour gently indeed, but with a calm coldness by which a nature like his must have been wounded to the quick. Was it then such a sin to have loved her, or, loving, to have buried his grief within his own bosom, and still watched over her with untiring patience? And for this she had never vouchsafed a word of comfort; but, entrenched within her pride, had concealed both her sorrows and her joys from one so loving and generous, that he would have wept

with her tears, and smiled if she rejoiced, even while his own heart was sinking under its grief and disappointment.

Now he was gone, and for ever ! without one tear of sympathy which might have soothed and reconciled him to the abandonment of his hopes. Oh ! could Melanthe, in that hour of stern self-communion which she held by the side of the dead, have recalled to her mind one instant when even a word of pity had been given to calm the tempest of hidden sorrow, or in which her unbending pride had stooped to confide in the heart she knew to be her own, what a ray of comfort would now have shone upon the darkness of her regret !

Frightened and shocked by the unhallowed addresses of the Cardinal, she had taken refuge in her virtue and her reserve, and for the moment all semblance of love bore to her eyes the same unholy tint : and she had treated the gentle and submissive Gennaro with the same sternness she had displayed towards the iron-breasted libertine Borgia. If she ever had contemplated a line of conduct more marked by pity and by kindness, she had, as is so

often the case when we forget the uncertainty of life, deferred the execution of her plan to some future day; and now she felt that she had exercised a useless and uncalled for severity towards one who, if she could not love, was too good for her to have feared.

But regret was vain. Gennaro lay dead before her. Dead—and for her! Still for her had been his every thought and action: while Montesecco, he, upon whom her whole soul relied, had abandoned her—condemned her without a hearing. Equally tenacious in his pride, he had, upon a mere suspicion, cast her off, and now she was alone in the world. Alone! There is something in that word full of misery to the dependant nature of woman; and Melanthe shrunk from the thought, as, with trembling fingers, she clasped the frozen hand of Gennaro, and tried to banish from her mind the certainty that an hour was fast approaching when the tomb must claim its own, and she should be yet more terribly *alone*!

Heedless of her sorrow, the hand of time moved on; and Melanthe stood by the newly-made grave,

bathing with her tears the marble that covered the last resting-place of the poor Greek boy—the fond—the beautiful, and the true.

Then she felt anew the misery of losing a faithful friend—even if that friend be not of our own choosing, still it is a loss, that wrings tears of blood from the heart ! She looked upon the grave, and then hurriedly cast a glance upon the bright blue sky that canopied the earth—was there upon the bosom of that wide earth, one heart that loved her like that which now lay cold and still within the tomb ? It is a dreadful hour, when we ask this question, as we stand beside the last home of the dead ; and the silence seems to answer, “ No ! not one ! ”

And yet more dreadful is it, when, in the flush of life and health, the living tomb closes upon our hope, and the silence of the heart we trusted tells us we are abandoned, and doomed to drag on an existence of misery. Bitter indeed is this lot to bear ! and Melanthe, whilst she knelt by the grave of Gennaro, felt with anguish that she could better have endured to kneel by the tomb of Montesecco

than to breathe the same air that he breathed, yet to know that his heart was estranged from her for ever !

“ Lady ! ” said Caterina, who had accompanied Melanthe to the funeral, “ do not weep any longer beside that grave ! Be comforted, the Holy Saints have taken your brother to their keeping. Come, let me lead you home.”

“ Not yet,” replied Melanthe, as with a fresh burst of weeping she threw herself upon the ground. Caterina knelt by her side, and endeavoured to support her upon her breast, gently caressing the beautiful head of Melanthe in the hope of comforting her.

“ I will go to the priest to-night,” said the poor woman, “ and he shall say a mass for your brother’s soul ; and I have money enough to buy a large waxen taper to burn before the shrine. Be comforted, my poor child ! You say you have rich relations at Rome, so you can endow a chapel, and he will pass lightly through purgatory. Do not grieve so, Signora !—he was so young and so gentle—he cannot have done much wrong. See,

here is your rosary—tell your beads, and the Holy Virgin will smile upon you from Heaven!—Here, take them, and I will say a prayer to the blessed Madonna myself!” and the good old woman bent down by the side of Melanthe, and prayed, and at length prevailed upon the weeping girl to rise, and saw with joy that she was more calm.

“I am glad we are going home,” observed Caterina, “for there is a crowd gathering before us; and the city is by no means quiet. Yesterday, after the funeral of the Signor Giuliano de’ Medici, the streets were in an uproar, the people wanted to break into the prisons.”

“Good Caterina,” said Melanthe, “had we not better go round by the upper bridge?—I am so afraid of the crowd.”

“We shall be safer in the public way,” replied Caterina, “for, if any danger happens, we can go to some of the soldiers. The streets are full of them; and besides, we shall pass the house of the Signor Angelo Politiano, and he desired me, if you wanted anything, to be sure to go to him.”

“As you will, Caterina,” said Melanthe; “I

only wish to get home as quietly as possible, and not to see any one."

But it was by no means the wish of Caterina not to see any one. For five long days she had been almost entirely shut up in her house, and her curiosity had been very imperfectly gratified by the few particulars she had been able to discover. They moved on therefore towards the city; and for some time their steps were unimpeded; but on entering the street where the palace of the Signoria was situated, they found the way thronged. Citizens of every rank mingled with the lowest classes of the people, children, women, and soldiers, so blocked up the passage, that it was almost impossible to advance. The multitude, though dense, was orderly; and, by the look of intense anxiety with which every face was turned to the door of the palace, some great event connected with it seemed pending.

"Good people, let us pass, if you please," said Caterina, pushing her way through the crowd, while Melanthe followed her.

"That is easier said than done," replied several, as they tried to make a little room.

“ Stand still in front,” screamed a shrill voice, “ we are pushed under the horses’ feet.”

“ Misericordia ! help me up ! ” said another, apparently from the ground, and a man divested of cap and cloak, and with his face covered with dust, was lifted from the earth, after having been nearly trampled to death.

“ Santa Maria ! we shall never get through,” said Caterina.

“ Let us return, pray do, good Caterina,” suggested Melanthe in a low voice, as she endeavoured to draw Caterina from the spot where she stood ; but it was now almost as difficult to recede as to advance, and Caterina had not the slightest wish to get out of the crowd.

“ You had better stand still, Signora, and wait for the decree,” said a young citizen, who, as the hood of Melanthe was dragged aside by the pressure of the crowd, had caught a glimpse of her beautiful face.

“ Ay, take the Signor’s advice,” whispered Caterina ; “ see, he has made room for you ; stand upon the step, and you will see better.”

Melanthe mechanically obeyed, and Caterina con-

tinued:—" Well, and what are you all standing here for? what are we to see?"

" Nothing," replied a surly looking man next to her; " but we shall hear."

" Hear what?" asked Caterina, who was dying with curiosity.


" Why, the decree of the Signoria, of course," replied the man.

" What decree? what is it?" urged Caterina; but the man only shrugged his shoulders, like many people, not conceiving it possible that others should be ignorant of that which he knew himself.

" Gentil Signor," said Caterina, to the citizen who had given them room upon his step, " what is the decree of which they speak? what is going to happen?"

" The magistrates are trying the prisoners implicated in the conspiracy," replied the citizen; " and the result will be announced to the people."

" Hush! silence!" was now shouted from all sides, and the window of the balcony was observed to open. In a moment every tongue was mute, and every ear was strained to catch the expected



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first that came was Giacopo Salviati, brother to the Archbishop of Pisa ; and such was the double detestation in which the crime of the murderous prelate was regarded, by a people, whose deep respect for their priests formed a striking feature in their character, that a torrent of abuse instantly overwhelmed him. Every opprobrious epithet they could devise was heaped upon him ; and mothers pointed him out to their children, as an object of hatred and contempt. The cheek of the old man blanched when he looked upon the threatening multitude, and instinctively he drew near to the soldiers, as the fierce words and execrations of the people met his ear.

Three others, whose dress and shaven crowns betokened to belong to the sacred calling followed, and were in like manner hissed and hooted by the crowd ; when all at once, as the fifth prisoner descended the steps, the tumult was hushed, for a moment there was a dead silence, and then above the stilled and pity-stricken multitude, rung out a cry of such thrilling agony, that every eye was turned towards the spot from whence it came.

The cry was that of the uncontrollable grief

that bursts from a breaking heart; and, as it reached the ear of Montesecro, for it was his appearance in the character of a condemned culprit which had been its cause, he started, and his pale cheek glowed as he turned his eyes anxiously upon the crowd. His heart too truly told him that there was but one who could thus feel for him in his hour of danger and disgrace. For an instant the certainty that Melanthe was near, took from him the recollection of the position in which he stood; and with violent efforts he endeavoured to burst his bonds, as he threw himself forward towards the spot from whence the cry had issued. He was soon recalled, however, to a sense of his unhappy situation by the soldiers who surrounded him, and who, seizing upon him, forced his steps in a contrary direction, and in a few moments he was lost to view. But the crowd, ever eager for an object whereon to vent its excitement, had now turned all its attention to the unfortunate Melanthe, who, senseless in the arms of those who had at the time been nearest to her, knew not the cruel and unjust remarks which were ventured by many of the bystanders, as, in order to recover her, the hood

and cloak were torn from her shoulders, and the rare beauty of her face and form revealed to every eye. In vain did poor Caterina, who immediately recognised in Montesecco the visitor who had come to her house at so early an hour, the day of the murder of Giuliano, attempt to deny that it was his appearance which had overwhelmed Melanthe with grief.

"I tell you," she persisted, "she knows nothing of the prisoner. She has lost her brother—we were coming back from his funeral."

"That may be," replied the surly man, who seemed, from the first moment, to have taken a particular dislike to Caterina.

"But she knows the prisoner also, and I dare say was implicated in the plot."

"She, poor child!" exclaimed the pitying voice of a woman; "what does she know of plots? Perhaps she loves him."

"Ah!" said another, "he is handsome enough for that."

"Santa Maria! What a pity to cut off such a head!"

"Yes, and did you see what a beautiful form,—why, he was taller, by a head, than any of the soldiers," replied a young girl, who was endeavouring to raise herself to catch another glimpse of Montesecco, as he moved down the street.

"Now, by the bones of St. Peter, only to hear how women talk," exclaimed the surly man; "what does it signify what the man's head was like—it will be chopped off in the morning."

"But it does signify. You saw the people would not hoot at him—he was so beautiful," said the girl. "I tell you, he was the Ambassador of the Pope. I saw him at the masque at Fiesole, and he was the handsomest man there."

"And the grandest," cried another; "I saw him come in, and, Madre di Dio! but his dress was all velvet and gold and jewels—finer than the grand petticoat of the Virgin at our convent."

"Peace, will you?" said the surly man; "if he is a noble knight, the more shame for him to be a murderer!"

"He is no murderer, I dare be sworn," said Caterina, who could not help feeling degraded by

the idea of being implicated with persons of such doubtful character. "But see—she revives—good friends, stand back, and give her a little air, and do not say such cruel words before her. I tell you she is unhappy—her brother was buried to-day."

"Poor thing! poor child!" was now uttered in various tones of commiseration by the volatile crowd, ever ready for a new impression.

"Yes, and moreover," continued Caterina, whose natural love of talking began to revive the moment she found that she was likely to escape being taken up as a conspirator; "only for the poor boy that she is mourning for, you, my good citizens, would have lost your ruler."

"How? where? what does she say?" asked a hundred tongues.

"I say," replied Caterina, whose self-importance was rapidly gaining ground, "that poor Gennaro, who was buried this morning, was killed in the church, trying to save Lorenzo de' Medici; and that this is his sister, that you want to make out a conspirator."

The declaration of Caterina, uttered with a loud

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accord, uncovered their heads, as if from respect to the deep grief by which they saw she was oppressed. This gentle tribute to her sorrow was a balm to the heart of Melanthe ; and as soon as she could move, she arose, and, leaning on the arm of Caterina, she bowed with a sad smile to those who had assisted her, and laid her hand upon her heart, for she could not speak. Many a blessing, and many a prayer followed her mute appeal to the sympathy of the crowd ; and more than one bright eye was dimmed with tears, as the people watched her whilst ascending the steps of the palace of the Signoria, whither she had made a sign to Caterina to lead her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE appearance of Montecoso, in the character of a condemned criminal, had occasioned a shock of so much severity to Melantha, that her physical powers had been totally unable to support it. She had calculated with such confidence, upon his timely escape from the city on the morning of the murder, that she had never allowed her mind to dwell upon the possibility of his danger ; but Montecoso, although he had escaped from immediate death, had been captured ere he could reach the frontier ; and the very circumstance of his flight must have betrayed his secret, even had not the confession of others amongst the conspirators sufficiently implicated him to render the sentence of death an act of justice.

Even at that moment, when, by a timely declara-

tion of the circumstances which had led to his joining the conspiracy, as well as the fact of his secession from it, having been the means of saving the life of Lorenzo, he might have averted the fatal blow about to fall upon him, Montesecco had preserved silence. That proud and sensitive heart could not brook to lay open its workings to the eye of man ; and so deep was his love for her, who, he fancied, had cruelly wronged him, that death was to him far preferable to the misery of admitting to others even a suspicion of her unworthiness. His peace was gone for ever ; and with a feeling of proud despair he scorned to owe to the intercession of his rival the life which he had embittered. In silence, therefore, had Montesecco submitted to his sentence.

The unhappiness of Melanthe, although it had nearly paralysed her faculties, could not long deter her from the course which she felt she ought to pursue. There might be shame, there was misery in the disclosure she was about to make : but the life of a fellow creature was at stake ; and had the accused been one in whom she had never felt an

interest, the feeling of rectitude, which was the ruling principle of the conduct of Melanthe, would have led her to adopt the same course.

She entered the palace of the Signoria with one thought—to speak the truth, and no selfish consideration could have deterred her from her object. The moment when, impelled by circumstances so unforeseen, she had been forced to demand an audience of the magistrates, was well adapted to

strike with awe a young and isolated stranger; and as Melanthe, separated from Caterina, advanced alone into the midst of that grave assembly of statesmen, for an instant her step faltered and her eye fell; but she rallied, quickly, as the thought of her high purpose rushed to her mind.

The whole body of the Signoria was present; and, as she scanned the faces which bent their curious looks upon her, not one countenance familiar to her eye appeared,—neither was any of the magistrates aware that she who stood before them was the saviour of Lorenzo. Though her cheek was pale and her lip trembling, such was the beauty and noble bearing of the afflicted girl, that a feeling of

interest and respect immediately rivetted the attention of all present.

“ I come,” she said, addressing herself to the Gonfalonière, who was distinguished by his occupying a seat raised above the rest, “ not to implore your pity, but to demand justice. But now, there is one gone out from your presence branded with a murderer’s name, to die a murderer’s death—Montesecco—the brave, the noble Montesecco ! He must not perish. And yet, Signori, I dare not say that he is altogether innocent, though guilty he cannot be, or I should not now stand here before you, nor would Lorenzo live !”

“ How !” exclaimed the Gonfalonière, as Melanthe, overcome by her feelings, paused for a moment.

“ What mean these words ? The name of Montesecco stands foremost on the list.”

“ It may have done so, and yet my words are true,” replied Melanthe. “ It was Montesecco, who revealed the whole of the conspiracy to me on the morning of the murder. I flew to the church ; and it was this hand, directed by his words, that saved

more than one look of indignation from
the chief magistrate ;
those days, none could
give credence to her
solemnity which froze

“ The decrees of
reversed.”

“ But if they are un-
just—”

“ The prisoner made
no answer.”

“ And that itself is
guilt,” suggested one of
the judges.

Melanthe turned her head
with intense anxiety,
trembling voice, “ And
justice to one who repents
his crime—
Think, think what might
have been the fate of Flor-
enzo, the fate of Flor-
enzo—”

To this appeal no immediate answer was returned. A whispered observation passed between some of the magistrates, and one of them, addressing Melanthe, replied,

“ Lady ! we grieve to seem to doubt your words ; yet, in so grave a matter, further proof would be necessary, to stay the execution of a criminal. We would gladly lean to the side of mercy, but in an hour like this suspicion becomes a virtue, for we know not whether we speak to foe or friend. Be not offended, then, if we should say so strange a tale requires some further confirmation.”

Whilst these words were slowly uttered, the changing countenance of Melanthe showed how bitter was the strife of feeling she endured. At one moment, horror blanched her lips, as she imagined the fate of Montesecco to be irrevocably fixed ; and then the recollection that by having refused to confide to the ear of Lorenzo the secret she had now disclosed, she had deprived herself of powerful aid, made her heart sicken : but when she heard the insinuated doubts of the magistrate as to the veracity of her tale, it seemed



before the magistrates in the uncertain light of a suppliant, an impostor, or a spy, was, by this act of homage, raised in their eyes to the dignity of a queen.

The Gonfalonière immediately informed Lorenzo of the nature of her declaration ; and Melanthe could scarcely restrain a cry of joy, as the reply of Lorenzo reached her ear :—

“ Not only is it true, but Montesecco must be saved. I myself will pay his ransom, should the state demand it. And now, Signora,” he continued, turning to Melanthe, “ I would spare you the pain which it will cause you to listen to some of the disclosures about to be made to the Signoria ; but it may not be. The matter is too grave, and there is much that concerns you. I will therefore pray your patience, while the good father Piero reads the confession of the dying Luca Pitti—the foulest traitor that ever entered the walls of a prison.”

The magistrates started at these words ; for Luca Pitti, until the last moment, had contrived completely to deceive them ; and Melanthe having,



richest citizens of Florence, and cousin to Luca Pitti. Martino, having made a journey into France, accompanied by his son, then an infant, and Luca Pitti, was, with his child, supposed to have perished in crossing the Alps, during a severe snow storm; and his large fortune had, consequently, reverted to Luca Pitti. Part of it had been employed in building the palace which bore his name, ^{and} which was yet unfinished; but the greater part was still in his possession.

It was ^{so} quite true that Martino di Cione had perished, but it needed an hour like the present to tear the secret from the guilty breast of the murderer. He had died by the hand of his cousin; Luca Pitti, was about to inflict the same fate upon the infant Uberto, when, either a feeling of compassion found entrance to his bosom, or his own childless state suggested another course. He spared Uberto; and having carried him to a distance, bribed some peasants to declare that he was their son, whom Luca Pitti had adopted. After a few years he became fearless of detection; he avowed his interest in the young Montesecco, and gave

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of Florence.

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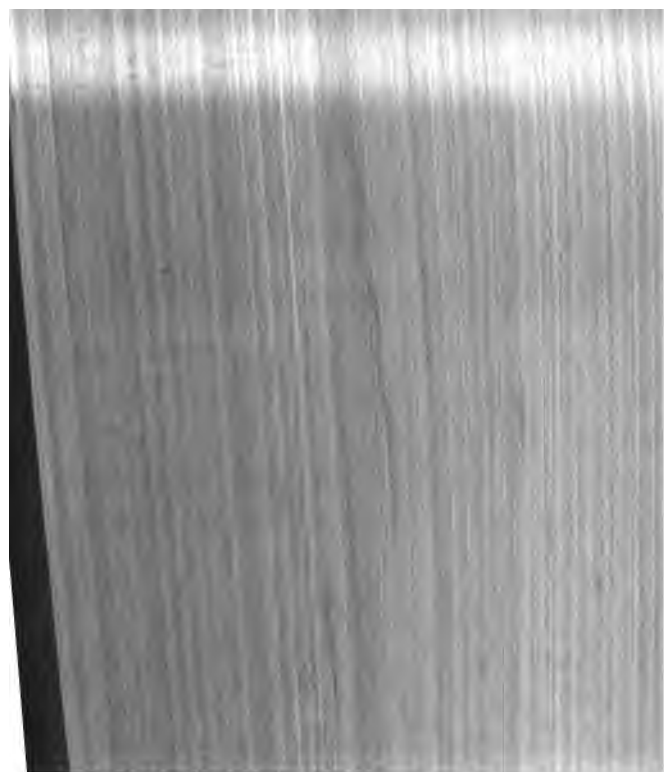
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goaded into crime through the finest feelings of his nature, Lorenzo once more demanded of the magistrates the pardon and release of Montesecco. Many there were who would have given to him unconditional liberty ; but some, more tenacious than the rest, insisted that the same sentence should be pronounced upon him as that which, at the entreaty of Lorenzo, had been pronounced upon Guglielmo de' Pazzi, the husband of Bianca de' Medici, which was, that he should remain for ever at his country seat, which was distant five-and-twenty miles from Florence.

Again, it was urged that Guglielmo had actually been taken in arms against the Medici ; while Montesecco had quitted Florence before the murder.

At length, the wishes of Lorenzo prevailed ; and, with a glowing cheek and a beating heart, Melanthe saw the officer depart with orders for the unconditional release of Montesecco. He was to be free. Alas ! would his freedom bring happiness or misery to her ? This question was now soon to be at rest.

Escorted by Lorenzo and his friends, Melanthe,



offer of Hassan to quit Rome for ever, the instant that Elphenor should be restored to freedom. Without apprising the Cardinal of his intentions, the Pope commanded the immediate liberation of the prisoner; and Hassan with Elphenor were on their way to Florence, ere Borgia was aware of such a step being contemplated. On discovering what had occurred, his rage at first knew no bounds; but receiving, the next day, intelligence of the escape of Melanthe from the brigands, he was forced to smother his resentment, and secretly to acknowledge himself baffled on all sides.

“Poor Vanozia,” said Melanthe with a sigh, as she folded up the letter, and recollected the beauty and the sorrow of the writer; but in another moment the embrace of her early friend, Clarice, and the clamour of delight with which Mariana, who had accompanied Hassan and Elphenor, overwhelmed her “dear child,” drove away all thoughts of sadness from her mind.

And then, after a little while given to the overwhelming joy of this re-union, there was a deep silence. There was one missing from that

